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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JULY 1980

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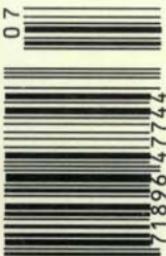
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ENCORE FOR DEATH by Brett Halliday

It started as a pleasant evening at the theatre with Lucy and friends. Within twenty-four hours two of the play's principals had been attacked, and Mike Shayne was up to his earlobe in clients — and killers out to get him, too!..... 6

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Mike Shayne Mystery Makers

A newcomer to the pages of MSMM is ALAN J. WARREN, author of "In the Cards," who tells us:

I was born and raised and currently live in California. I consider myself a fairly prolific and versatile writer: my fiction (mainly science fiction and suspense) has appeared in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine and Fantome, and I've had articles (mainly on film) published in Take One, The Armchair Detective, and Cinecurrent. I'm currently at work on a novel that is not in the sf or suspense genre, and I fully intend to go on writing for as long as I can get away with it.

CHESTER H. CARLFI, whose "Girl in the Dark" appears in this issue, best known for such best-selling novels as *The Inscrutable Pumpkin*, *Bells in the Night*, and *The Burmese Mask*, has been a popular writer in the suspense and science-fiction fields since his first sale of a television script to *Captain Video and his Video Rangers* almost thirty years ago. Since then, he has sold over 1,000 pieces in a variety of fields, including mystery, science-fiction/fantasy, juveniles and travel.

A graduate of the University of Chicago, Carlfi is six-feet-four-inches tall, weighs 250 pounds, and has a black belt in karate. He has lived and traveled extensively throughout the Far East. His favorite watering hole is Hong Kong, which he says is "an incredible city." A bachelor, he now resides in a Spanish-style home high in the hills above Hollywood, California, with two giant German Shepherd dogs named "Bogie" and "Baby." His hobbies include skydiving, skindiving, and drinking Japanese sake.

There's an old adage that those who can't, teach. GARY ARPIN is not one of those, as his story "Bells" proves quite capably. He says:

I wish I had something exciting to tell you about my life. I was born in San Francisco in 1944 and grew up there and in New Jersey. I attended Northwestern and the University of Virginia and am now teaching here in the midwest. For the time being I am one of those scholar-mystery writers. Right now I am working on the final draft of a novel.

If you can find anything there to use, you're welcome to it.

We couldn't, Gary, but we decided to use it anyway. (Notice how cleverly I slip in the editorial "we" when the going gets controversial?)

Moving right along, here's THOMAS DWYER, author of "Obituary."

Born in Topeka, Kansas. Live in New York City. In WWII served in the South Pacific as a member of the U.S. Army. In civilian life Security Investigator for a Public Utility.

As you can guess from his concise autobiography, he specializes in short-short stories.

MEL D. AMES is a Canadian, whose "The Enigma of Andrew Marler" appears in this issue.

I began as an advertising copywriter, he tells us, freelanced my way through a variety of occupations, have had a few stories accepted (EQMM, plus men's mags — all fiction) and I now devote my full time to writing. I enjoy reading mystery fiction and that is primarily what I intend to write.

He is also the creator of Lieutenant Detective Cathy Carruthers, a beautiful (and of course female) cop whose debut will occur in the pages of MSMM as soon as it can be scheduled.

(Continued on page 56)

Encore for Death

by BRETT HALLIDAY





MIKE SHAYNE felt like he was being strangled.

It wasn't one of the various roughnecks he had run into during his years as a private detective who was painfully cutting off his wind, though. It was an innocuous little bow tie that Shayne thought looked silly, almost as silly as the cummerbund and monkey suit he had on.

He leaned over in the plush seat and whispered to Lucy Hamilton, "I still don't see why I had to get all dressed up in this thing."

On the other side of Lucy, Timothy Rourke, who was similarly attired, said, "Relax, Mike, the play's only three hours. You can hold your breath that long."

Lucy, who looked dazzling in an evening gown that set off her fair skin and soft brown hair, smiled at Shayne and said, "I told you, Michael, evening wear is traditional at an opening night."

"We're a hell of a long way

from Broadway," Shayne grunted.

He glanced around at the rapidly filling auditorium of the Suncoast Playhouse. He had to admit that the other members of this opening night audience were all dressed formally, but that didn't make him any less uncomfortable.

It was ten minutes to curtain time. Hoping to make those minutes go a little faster, Shayne opened the program he had been handed as they entered the theater and began scanning it.

This was the first play that Shayne had attended in a long time, and despite his grumbling, he was really rather interested in it. He flipped over the fancy title page of the program and studied the photograph of the playwright and his biography on the back of it.

The man in the picture had a lined, rough-hewn face, with a shock of curly, graying hair over it. He looked more like a truck driver or a construction worker than an author, but Shayne could see from the listing of his credits that he had written over a dozen well-received plays, all of which had long runs on Broadway. Since the play they were here to see, *Spectre on the Noon Train*, was Malcolm Porter's newest, this opening night was quite an occasion in the dramatic world.

Shayne looked past Lucy to Tim Rourke and asked, "Why in the world are they opening this

play in Miami? I thought plays had their first runs in Philadelphia, New Haven, places like that."

Rourke would have the answer to that one if anyone would. As the top reporter for the Miami *Daily News*, Rourke knew more about the most unlikely things than anybody else Shayne could think of. The lanky reporter tugged a little at his own tie and replied, "Look at the credits! The executive producer is Bernard J. Darrow."

"So?"

"So Darrow's the angel behind the show. He's putting up the money for it, and he lives here in Miami, so that's where the premiere is."

"Makes sense," Shayne nodded.

Lucy was looking through her own program, and she suddenly pointed a slender finger. She had the program opened to the photos of the cast, and she was indicating a young woman who had smiled prettily at the camera.

"That's Monica," Lucy said. "She hasn't changed much since I knew her."

Shayne checked his own program. Monica Stevenson was an old friend of Lucy's and the real reason they were there. Lucy had kept up with her friend's acting career and this was the first chance she had to see Monica perform in person. She was playing Amanda, the second female lead. Shayne glanced at

the other pictures. The male and female leads were an attractive pair named Aaron Havens and Lynne Barrett, neither of whom Shayne had heard of. The director of the production was Jonathon Mallory, a man with a small, neat beard and a lean, ascetic face. Shayne knew nothing about him, either. A career of chasing down murderers and blackmailers and thieves didn't leave much time for fine arts, even if Shayne's interests had run in that direction, which they didn't. He enjoyed a good show as much as anybody, though, and he hoped the play was entertaining.

Every seat in the house was full now, and the chatter of the audience died away as the house lights went down. The curtain went up, revealing a set designed to look like the dining room of an antebellum plantation house, and an actor strolled onstage. A girl Shayne recognized as Monica followed him a second later, spoke the first line of dialogue, and the play was underway.

Three hours, two intermissions, and quite a few stifled yawns later, Shayne decided that Malcolm Porter wasn't exactly his style. As far as he was concerned, a lot of anguish and anger in the Old South didn't make a play, and he was glad when the curtain came down for the final time. Lucy, on the other hand, had been enthralled all the way through, and she applauded vigorously as

the cast took their bows. She turned to Shayne and said, "Wasn't it great, Michael?"

"Sure, Angel," he said, "if you like that kind of stuff."

Lucy stood up, gathering her purse and wrap. "Let's go backstage," she suggested. "I want to say hello to Monica."

She led the way up the aisle, against the flow of most of the other first-nighters, and Shayne and Rourke fell in behind. In a low voice, Rourke said, "There was an old Bogart picture on TV tonight, wasn't there?"

Shayne nodded glumly. "Don't tell me you'd have rather seen an old movie than this play?"

Rourke rolled his eyes, struck a melodramatic pose, and said, "Why, mercy, no!"

Shayne's mouth quirked in a grin.

They made their way backstage, where there was a hustle and bustle that reminded Shayne, strangely enough, of a winning locker room after a ball game. Lucy was looking for Monica Stevenson's dressing room, and as the three of them rounded a corner, Shayne suddenly heard angry voices.

"No! I told you, Aaron, I'm just not interested anymore. You'd be better off if you could get that through your thick head!"

"Why, you bitch! After all we've been through—"

Shayne could see the combatants now. Lynne Barrett was

inside her dressing room, the door open six inches or so, and outside was Aaron Havens, who seemed to be demanding entrance.

Lynne Barrett interrupted her fellow actor by saying, "You can forget all we've been through! Lord knows I'm trying to!"

Havens put a hand on the door and shoved, but Lynne was braced solidly on the other side of it. He glared at her and snapped, "You can't talk to me like that!"

Shayne murmured to Rourke, "A rehearsal for a new play, maybe?"

Rourke's grin was sardonic. "I don't think so. That looks and sounds like the real thing."

Lucy was checking the names on the other doors in the corridor. Shayne put his hands in his pockets and leaned a shoulder against the wall as he watched a man hurrying down the hall toward the quarreling Havens and Barrett. The big detective recognized the newcomer as Jonathon Mallory, the director.

Mallory put a hand on Havens' arm and said sharply, "I thought you agreed not to carry on like this, Aaron! You said you and Lynne would patch things up."

"I'm trying to," Havens growled, shaking his arm loose. "This goddam prima donna won't cooperate, though."

"Prima donna, am I?" Lynne yelped. "Why, you—"

It looked like a battle royal was

going to erupt any second. Shayne and Rourke exchanged glances as Mallory took Havens' arm again and tried to pull the irate actor away.

"Now listen to me, Aaron," Mallory said urgently. "Mr. Darrow is going to be here any minute, and I don't want him to see the two of you fighting, okay? The man doesn't know us, and I don't want him thinking we're a bunch of squabbling children. So just keep things cool, all right?"

"All right, all right," Havens agreed grudgingly.

Lucy had found the door she was looking for and knocked on it, and then she was busy embracing the girl who had answered the knock. Lucy turned to Shayne and Rourke and said, "Monica, these are my friends, Michael Shayne and Timothy Rourke. Michael is my boss, too, but you know that."

Monica Stevenson was medium height, with a lithe figure and blond hair. She wore a blue dressing gown belted around her trim waist, and she stepped forward to shake hands with Shayne and then Rourke.

"I'm glad to meet you, "Monica," Shayne said. "Lucy has told us a lot about you."

Monica smiled. "I've heard a lot about you, too, Mr. Shayne. Your cases seem to make the papers all over the country."

"Make it Mike," Shayne said. "And sometimes the reporters

exaggerate, like this long drink of water here."

"Don't pay any attention to him, Miss Stevenson," Rourke said. "In his line of work, he gets hit on the head a lot."

Shayne grinned, tucked Lucy's arm in his, and stepped back to let Rourke have a clear field in the flirting department.

As Lucy and Rourke were congratulating Monica on the play, Shayne heard more voices coming down the hall. When he glanced around, he saw Mallory and Havens turning to meet four men. All of them wore tuxedos, and he recognized the one in the lead as David Jernigan, the producer. The man right behind him must be Bernard Darrow, Shayne thought.

The man following Jernigan closely was tall, his broad shoulders stretching the fabric of his tuxedo. His hair was iron gray, but though he was well into middle-age, there was an air of robust health about him. The two men behind him were much younger, but they were equally big and hard-faced.

Shayne blocked out the small talk and reminiscences that Lucy and Monica were trading, and concentrated on what the group down the hall were doing. Jernigan said exuberantly, "Here they are, Mr. Darrow. Jonathon, Aaron, this is our executive producer, Bernard Darrow."

Darrow nodded to the actor and the director and said, "I enjoyed

the production, gentlemen." He shook hands with Havens and then with Mallory. The bearded director said, "It's nice to finally meet you, Mr. Darrow. We certainly appreciate all the help you've given us."

Darrow gave him a brief, tight smile, then turned away to speak to Jernigan. Twenty feet down the hall, Shayne reached up to tug slightly at his left earlobe. He could have been mistaken, but he sensed a certain tension in the air. Putting his finger on what was causing it was another matter, though. Havens was trying to cover up his surly mood, but some of it could have been coming through.

Shayne caught Rourke's attention, no easy matter when a pretty girl was around, and asked, "Why does Bernard Darrow's name sound familiar to me?"

"Beats me, Mike," Rourke shrugged. "I can try to find out something on him if you want."

Shayne shook his head. "No need. I just thought I'd seen him or heard of him somewhere before."

Lucy turned to him and said, "I've got an idea, Michael. Why don't the four of us go out for a late supper?"

"Sounds good to me, Angel," Shayne smiled. "How about it, Monica? Tim?"

Monica said, "I think I'd like that. Just let me finish changing."

"Count me in, Mike," Rourke added, with a smile in Monica's direction.

The group down the hall was breaking up, Mallory excusing himself and hurrying away. Darrow and his two companions left, also, with Jernigan right behind them. That left Havens standing outside Lynne Barrett's door. He gave the closed door a glare, then turned his truculent expression toward Shayne, who met his gaze solidly. After a moment, Havens turned away and stalked down the hall.

Monica went back into her dressing room and then rejoined them less than ten minutes later, looking fresh and lovely in a fashionable outfit. She led them out one of the rear entrances of the theater that put them near the parking lot. The four of them cut across the now half-empty lot toward Shayne's Buick.

Walking parallel to them and about forty yards away were Bernard Darrow and his two men. Shayne had already pegged them as bodyguards. Darrow must have been a wealthy man, Shayne knew, to be backing a show headed for Broadway, and it wasn't unusual for a wealthy man to have bodyguards.

The lot was lit brightly by arc lights. Shayne walked alongside Lucy. Monica was on the other side of Lucy, with Rourke flanking her. Lucy and Monica were still chattering happily, enjoying their

reunion. Shayne glanced to his right, to where Darrow and his men were just arriving at a big limousine.

Death buzzed in front of Shayne's face.

That flat whine was a familiar sound to him. It was a bullet, cutting the air, close enough he almost felt the wind of it. He grabbed Lucy's arm and barked, "Down! Everybody down!"

He heard the muffled sound of another shot as he dove for the asphalt, pulling Lucy with him. Rourke had been shot at before, too, and his reactions were almost as fast as Shayne's. He hustled Monica down behind a parked car.

Lucy gasped, "Michael, what is it?"

"Somebody's shooting, Angel." Shayne grated. "I don't know if we're the targets or not, but that first shot came too close for comfort."

Shayne heard more shots now, heard someone cry out in pain. He came up in a crouch and looked around. Rourke, Lucy, and Monica were all in positions of relative safety behind cars. His Buick was only about fifteen feet away, and there was a gun clipped under the dashboard.

"Everybody stay put," he rapped. "I'm going to see what's going on."

"Mike, take it easy," Rourke called. "They may not be shooting at us."

"They're shooting at somebody," Shayne replied.

Without waiting any longer, he sprinted for the Buick. The front door was locked, of course, but it took only a split-second for Shayne to unlock it and throw it open. Diving into the car, he groped for the gun and felt his fingers closing on it. Jerking it away from the magnetic clip that held it, he rolled back out and scanned the lot rapidly, bringing the .45 up into firing position.

Two rows over, Shayne saw Darrow and one of his men crouching behind their car. The other man was sitting up, his back against a wheel, clutching a wounded shoulder. As Shayne watched, another bullet whined through the air, and this time the big redhead detective caught the flash of the gun.

The sniper was at the edge of the lot, shielded by both cars and darkness. Shayne ducked behind another vehicle and started running in that direction. He heard Darrow shout something at him, but he paid no attention.

Shayne sent a high shot in the direction of the sniper, and then he heard running footsteps. Unless there were two attackers, that meant he could take more chances. A man running away would have trouble hitting anything with a wild shot. Shayne straightened up and charged after the footsteps.

Someone came up beside him.

Shayne looked over quickly, saw that it was Darrow's man, and didn't slow down. Together, they ran to the edge of the parking lot and into the open area next to it. The sound of the sniper's running feet had faded away, and Shayne stopped abruptly.

Darrow's man stopped, too, and Shayne growled, "We might as well forget it. He had too big a lead on us once he decided to quit shooting."

The other man nodded without saying anything, and they carefully walked back to the parking lot. Rourke, Lucy, and Monica had joined Darrow around the wounded man, and they were all buzzing with questions. All except Darrow. He was grimly silent until Shayne joined the group, then he said, "Thank you for running him off. He had the drop on us, that's for sure."

"My pleasure," Shayne said. "Some of those shots nearly got us, too. You think he was after you?"

Darrow shrugged. "Who knows? The way things were, Mr. . . . ?"

"Shayne, Mike Shayne."

"The way things were, Mr. Shayne, he could have been shooting at either group. We were pretty well lined up. Do you have any enemies?"

"A few," Shayne grunted. "And you?"

Darrow smiled thinly. "Everyone has enemies. I'd best get my

friend here to the doctor."

"What about the police?" Rourke asked. "Shouldn't somebody call them?"

"We can make our reports later, I think," Darrow said. "Right now, I want to get some medical attention for my man."

"All right, Darrow," Shayne said. "But I'll tell Will Gentry you'll be talking to him later."

"Of course." Darrow and his other man helped the wounded one into the car, and they drove away rapidly. Lucy and Monica both looked shaken. Shayne herded them into his Buick, saying, "We might as well go get that supper and forget about this. It's all over now. I'll call Will from the restaurant and let him know what happened."

Rourke looked at Shayne over the top of the car and said, "He won't like us leaving the scene."

"Nothing happened here now," Shayne said. "I can tell it just as well from there." His voice dropped and stopped Rourke from entering the car momentarily. "Tim?"

"Yeah?"

"I think I'd like it if you'd dig up whatever you've got on Darrow."

"You think he was the target?"

"It was either him or one of us. I'll sleep better if I know which one of us somebody wants to kill."

II

LUCY HAMILTON may have been

more than a secretary to Mike Shayne, but her value in the office had never been in doubt in the big investigator's mind. When he arrived at his office the next morning, she was already there, hard at work on his always voluminous correspondence, despite the late hour they had both been up to the night before.

Shayne tossed his hat on the rack and asked, "Anything up, Angel?"

She shook her head. "Nothing except that Tim wants you to call him. Did anyone else try to kill you after you went home last night, Michael?"

"No; and I didn't really expect any trouble. I've got a feeling that gunman was after Darrow, Angel, not any of us."

Shayne went on into the inner office and settled down in the comfortable chair behind the big desk. Drawing the phone over to him, he dialed Rourke's number at the *News*.

When the reporter came on the line, Shayne said, "Morning. Lucy said you had something for me?"

Rourke's voice betrayed a trace of excitement, something unusual in the cynical newsman. He said, "I found out about Darrow for you, Mike."

"And?"

"The reason he sounded familiar to you is that he's a crook. Or rather, he *used* to be a crook. He was one of the top men in the

New York organization twenty years ago."

That rang bells in Shayne's head. He ran a thumbnail along his rugged jawline and asked, "What's he doing down here?"

"Living the good life of a retired gangster, from what I gather. He's got plenty of money; that's why he can afford to fool around with things like Malcolm Porter's play. I guess he's trying to add a little culture to his life."

"Has he been in any trouble down here?"

"Not a bit. I couldn't find any convictions on his record anywhere, and evidently he'd keeping his nose clean down here, but good. Still, that doesn't mean much. Boys like him are good at covering things up that they don't want known."

"Then it could have been him that the gunman was after last night," Shayne mused.

"That makes sense to me, Mike, unless you're working on something that could get you shot at."

"Not at the moment. I guess I can stop looking over my shoulder."

Shayne thanked Rourke for the information, and then the reporter said, "Say, Mike, any chance of us getting together again soon, the four of us? That Monica is some nice lady!"

Shayne grinned. "We'll see what we can do."

The conversation with Rourke

had given him food for thought. It was possible, even likely, that a man like Darrow would have plenty of enemies in the wood-work, ready to take a shot at him if the occasion arose.

If that was the case, though, Shayne decided, it was none of his business. He put the matter out of his head and concentrated on a security report he was doing for a Miami jeweler.

A few minutes passed while he worked on that, and then Lucy buzzed him on the intercom. He flipped the switch and said, "What is it, Angel?"

"There's a call for you." She hesitated. "It's Bernard Darrow, Michael."

Shayne grunted in surprise and reached for the phone. "I'll take it, Angel. Thanks." Picking up the receiver, he said, "Shayne here."

"This is Bernard Darrow, Mr. Shayne. I wanted to thank you again for helping us out last night. I knew your name was familiar, but I didn't realize you were the famous detective."

"No thanks necessary. I was just trying to save my skin and the people with me."

"At any rate, I was wondering if you could come out to my house," Darrow went on. "There's something I'd like to discuss with you."

"A business matter?"

"That's right. I'd like to hire you."

"Could you give me any idea of what it's about?"

"I'd rather talk to you in person." Darrow's words were polite enough, but Shayne could still perceive the hard edges of a man used to command. He considered refusing, but curiosity about Darrow and the attempt on his life the night before made him change his mind.

"I'd be glad to talk to you," Shayne said. "What's the address?"

Darrow gave him an address in an exclusive section of Miami, and Shayne said, "I'll be there in twenty minutes."

He hung up and went into the outer office. As he snagged his hat off the rack, Lucy asked, "Going to see Darrow?"

"That's right, Angel. Seems he wants to hire me."

"Watch out while you're there, Michael. Somebody might try to shoot him again."

Shayne grinned. "I think that's why he wants to hire me, Angel, to find out who wants him dead. Considering his background, I'd say we may have a lot of suspects."

He filled her in rapidly on what Tim Rourke had told him, then kissed her on the forehead and walked out jauntily. Lucy looked around the office and said to it, "My mother should have told me never to fall in love with a private eye."

Shayne had no trouble finding Darrow's house. It was on a quiet, tree-lined street, set well back off the road behind a brick wall. Shayne had to use a telephone set into one of the gateposts to get inside the grounds. Once he was in, he followed a circular drive up to the big house.

The front door swung open before he could ring the bell. A statuesque, raven-haired woman waited for him there. She looked like she was about thirty, and she made a blue sweater and white slacks look stunning. With a smile that was civil but not very warm, she said, "I'm Gloria Darrow, Mr. Shayne. My husband is waiting for you in the den."

Gloria Darrow took Shayne's hat and led him down a hall with two-inch thick carpet on the floor to a den in the rear of the house. As she opened the door into the room, Shayne could hear a clicking noise coming from inside.

He stepped into the room, and Gloria shut the door behind him. Bernard Darrow stood beside a large pool table in the center of the room, a cue in his hand. The man who had been with him the night before was sitting in a chair next to the wall, with what looked like a well-stocked bar beside him.

Darrow smiled and nodded at Shayne. The smile never made it from his lips to his eyes, but Shayne supposed that was the best he could do. Darrow was

dressed casually, and he lined up another shot with the cue as he said, "Glad you could come, Shayne. Care to shoot a little pool?"

"Maybe after we get our business out of the way," Shayne replied. "You said you wanted to hire me?"

Darrow stroked the cue ball and sent it clicking sharply against the seven ball. The seven bounced off the side and rolled straight and true into a corner pocket. Darrow said, "I want you to find out who tried to kill me last night, Shayne, and make sure they don't try again."

"Aren't the cops looking into it?"

Darrow straightened up. "I've heard good things about you, Shayne. I think I'd worry less if you were looking into it for me. It's not that I don't trust cops, but . . . I've seen 'em made monkeys of too many times."

"And sometimes it was you making monkeys out of them, wasn't it?" Shayne said bluntly.

That thin smile stretched Darrow's lips again. "Something tells me you've been doing a little checking up on me, Shayne."

"I was curious."

"Don't worry, I don't mind. Nobody has anything on me. You know why? I keep my nose clean. I'm a retired businessman, pure and simple. I've got this nice home, a lovely young wife, all the money I'll ever need. Why should

I do anything out of line?"

"The old days in New York were a different story, though, weren't they?"

The man next to the wall started to get up, his face hard, but Darrow waved him down with a negligent hand. "Don't bother, Frank. Now listen, Shayne, I'm not going to deny my past. The cops could never make anything stick, but that doesn't mean there aren't guys out there who might be holding a grudge. I told you what I want you to do. Will you take the job?"

Shayne felt no sympathy for this man, retired or not. Still, whoever had taken those shots at him had damn near hit some of his friends, and Shayne didn't like that a bit. He nodded abruptly and said, "All right, I'll take the case. But it won't be cheap."

"How much?" Darrow didn't sound like he really cared.

"Five thousand now, twenty more when I get results."

Darrow laughed. "Not if, but when, eh? I think we understand each other, Shayne. I'll write you a check."

He put the pool cue down and wrote out the check. Shayne tucked it away and started to turn, ready to leave and get to work. Darrow's voice stopped him.

"What about that game of pool?"

Shayne shook his head. "I don't play the game much."

Darrow gestured at the balls on

the table. "Give it a try. Just a few shots."

Shayne studied the layout. The three, eight, and fifteen balls were left on the table, grouped fairly near each other at the far end. He said, "Can I borrow your cue?"

Darrow handed the stick over. Shayne chalked it, ran it over his thumb a few times, and then started lining the shot up. After a few long seconds of concentration, he struck the cue ball sharply.

There was a series of clicks, and the three ball dropped into the side pocket. The fifteen was rolling toward a corner, and it fell in softly as the eight ball bounced off the end of the table, heading for the opposite end, losing momentum as it rolled, slowing down . . .

It glanced off the barely-moving cue ball and straight into a side pocket.

Darrow's man gave a low whistle, and the former mobster himself nodded slowly and smiled. "The eight ball last," he said. "And you don't play the game much."

Shayne shrugged, handed the cue back, and said, "Blind luck."

"Whatever you say, Shayne," Darrow said. "I'm just glad you're going to be working on my side."

III

DARROW HADN'T GIVEN HIM a

hell of a lot of information, Shayne thought as he drove back toward his office. Anyone with a career like Darrow's must have had hundreds, if not thousands, of enemies who would like to see him dead. Most of Darrow's life had been spent in New York, though, and if the gunman from the night before was someone with a grudge, it was likely that he came from New York, too. That gave Shayne a place to start. He could check with Miami Police Chief Will Gentry on any out-of-town hoods who had been reported to be in the vicinity, but a much better source of information might be the street contacts that Shayne had made in his years as a private detective.

Although it was a little early in the day, Shayne stopped at a couple of bars on his way and located several early drinkers who had provided him with good information in the past. None of them knew anything about anyone from New York who was in town looking to pay off an old debt, but they promised to keep their eyes and ears open.

Shayne headed for the office then, to start making some phone calls to his other contacts.

Lucy gave him a smile as he came into the office and asked, "Did you take the case?"

Shayne nodded. "It doesn't look like an easy one, either, Angel. I probably wouldn't have taken it if

we hadn't stumbled into that attempt last night, but I'd like to find out who nearly wasted us."

"You just don't like people shooting at you."

"Damn right!"

Shayne went on into the inner office and propped his feet up while making the calls to the various gamblers, touts, and bartenders who had a line on most of what happened in the Miami underworld. He spent nearly half an hour on the telephone, with no results. He had a lot of feelers out now, though, and maybe one of them would turn up something.

Shayne stood up, stretching his rangy body, as Lucy came into the room, bearing a cup of strong black coffee. Grinning, Shayne said, "Thanks, Angel. How did you know what I wanted?"

"Telepathy, I guess."

Shayne chuckled, sipped the coffee appreciatively, and turned toward the window. It was a nice day in Miami, and he enjoyed the sight of white clouds sailing through blue sky.

When his gaze dropped to the busy street below, he frowned in surprise. Striding determinedly down the sidewalk, his face set in a tight mask, was Jonathon Mallory. Shayne wondered what the director was doing in this section of town. As he watched, Mallory crossed the street at an intersection and headed directly for the entrance of the building in which Shayne's office was located.

Shayne pointed with a knobby finger and said, "Isn't that Jonathon Mallory, Angel?"

Lucy came to his side and looked down at the street herself. "I believe it is, Michael. Do you think he might be coming here?"

Shayne shrugged. "Might be, but I don't know what for."

Mallory was only a few doors away now. Shayne happened to raise his eyes to the building across the street before he sat down again, and his keen gaze immediately picked out something wrong.

The coffee cup crashed to the floor as Shayne jumped for the window. He threw the glass up, grabbing under his coat for his gun as he did so. Sticking his head out into the warm air, he yelled, "Mallory! Get down!"

Jonathon Mallory's head jerked up at Shayne's shout, and as he stared upwards in confusion, there was a sharp crack from across the street. A slug chipped the concrete at Mallory's feet.

Screams ripped out from passersby on the street, and there was a wholesale scurrying for cover. Mallory dove behind a van parked at the curb as another shot erupted from the rifle barrel that Shayne had spotted protruding from a window across the street.

Shayne leveled his pistol and squeezed off two quick shots at the sniper. He saw the angle of the barrel elevate, and he snapped to Lucy, "Get out of here, Angel!"

He ducked as Lucy hurried into the outer office, calling after her, "Get down and stay down!" There wasn't time to say anything else before a bullet shrieked through the room and pocked the opposite wall.

Shayne poked the nose of his gun over the windowsill and fired again. Then he rolled across the room, staying low, and dove into the outer office. He saw that Lucy was behind the heavy filing cabinet.

"Stay right there," he said calmly as another bullet tore into the office. "I'm going after whoever's over there. Give me two minutes to hit the street and draw his fire, then get out of here and get as far away from this office as you can."

"Michael, be careful!"

His smile was taut and grim. "The other guy's the one who'd better be careful."

He came up in a crouch, grabbed the knob of the office door and flung it open. Plaster sprayed over him as another slug hit the wall, but then he was through the door and sprinting down the hall.

As soon as Shayne came tearing out of the building and onto the sidewalk, he saw that the sniper was after Mallory again. The director was crouched behind the van, pale and terrified as bullets thumped into the vehicle. Shayne knew by the sound of the shots that the gunman wielded a high-

powered rifle and that one of the rounds could penetrate Mallory's cover at any time.

He had reloaded as he raced down the stairs to the street, and now he began to pour shots into the window where the rifleman was located. He saw the rifle jerk back suddenly, and then he heard the wail of sirens as the cops began to arrive. Keeping an eye on the window where the rifle had been, Shayne ran over to Mallory and crouched beside the director.

"Are you all right?" he asked hurriedly.

"I — I think so." He stared at Shayne with eyes wide. "You — you saved my life. Who are you?"

"Mike Shayne. We'd better stay low. I think I scared the guy off, but we'll stay put until the cops get here and make sure of it."

Some of Mallory's fright had left him now. "You're Mike Shayne, the private detective?"

"That's right."

"I — I was on my way to see you. But haven't I seen you before?"

"I was at the theater last night, backstage. My secretary is an old friend of Monica Stevenson's."

"Yes," Mallory nodded. "That's right. I remember seeing you there, but I had no idea you were Mike Shayne."

Several police cars had come to a screeching halt in the street, and Shayne waved at one of the uniformed officers he knew well.

Pointing, Shayne called, "The building across the street, John. Sniper on the second floor, fourth window from the corner. I think he's gone now."

The cops, guns drawn, ran into the building to check it out. Shayne turned back to Mallory and said, "You said you were on your way to see me?"

"I . . . I want to hire you, Mr. Shayne. I suppose the reason is obvious."

"Somebody's trying to kill you and you want me to find out who it is." Shayne didn't bother making a question out of it.

Mallory nodded. "This wasn't the first attempt on my life, Mr. Shayne. Earlier — "

The cop Shayne had spoken to came trotting up then, saying, "No sign of him, Mr. Shayne. Looks like you scared him off, all right. Can I get statements from you and this gentleman here?"

"Sure," Shayne said, and he rapidly filled the officer in on what had happened. Mallory told his version of the same story, and then the cop nodded. "You'll need to come in and sign the statements later," he said. "You know the procedure, Mr. Shayne."

"Right. I'll see you later, John."

Shayne helped the still-shaken Mallory to his feet and led him up to the office. As they came in, Shayne said, "We need some

more of that coffee, Angel."

Lucy was standing in the middle of the room, looking around at the damage. She shook her head and said, "We're going to have to get some bullet-proof windows, Michael."

"That's an idea, all right. Mr. Mallory, this is my secretary, Lucy Hamilton."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Mallory," Lucy said. "Monica has told me so much about you."

Mallory nodded. He was still pale, but he said politely, "The pleasure's mine, Miss Hamilton."

Shayne ushered Mallory on into the inner office, then stepped back to say to Lucy, "Put a little Martell in that coffee, will you, Angel?"

"Of course. I think we could all use some."

Shayne settled down behind his desk and sat back to wait for whatever Mallory had to say. The director ran a long-fingered hand over his face, pausing to tug gently at his beard, and then said, "I've nearly been killed twice today, Mr. Shayne. I need help."

"Tell me about the other time."

"I was leaving my hotel this morning, and as I walked across the mouth of the alley right next to it, a car came speeding out of it, right at me. They were trying to run me down, there was no doubt about that. It was just luck that got me out of the way in time. I . . . I suppose they ex-

pected me to freeze, but I jumped instead."

"Did you get a look at who was driving?"

Mallory shook his head. "It all happened too fast. After they missed me, they drove away rapidly, and I was too shaken up to get a license number or description of the car, let alone the driver."

Shayne's fingers strayed up to worry his earlobe. "Did you call the cops?"

"No . . . No, I didn't. I know I should have. But I went back to my room instead and started thinking. That's when I got the idea of hiring a private detective. I was told by the hotel manager that you were the best detective in the city."

Lucy came in then with two mugs of coffee. Mallory took his and gulped the hot liquid gratefully, not seeming to notice the brandy in it. He looked a little less upset when he finished.

"Can you do it, Mr. Shayne?" he asked. "Can you find out who's trying to kill me?"

Shayne asked a question of his own. "Do you have any idea who might want you dead?"

"No one, no one that I can think of. I don't even know anyone in Miami."

"Then maybe the killer followed you from somewhere else," Shayne suggested. He paused to reflect.

As a rule, he didn't work on

more than one major case at a time, and he would have been justified in refusing Mallory, since Bernard Darrow had hired him not two hours before. But a stubborn suspicion was nagging at Shayne's mind, and the more he thought about it, the more intrigued he was.

In less than twenty-four hours, someone had tried to kill both the financial backer and the director of *Spectre on the Noon Train*. That could be coincidence; there could be two would-be killers . . . But the connection was there, and there was no sense in ignoring it.

"I'll take your case, Mr. Mallory," Shayne said. "You're not giving me much to go on, though. Did you know that someone took a shot at Bernard Darrow last night, too?"

Mallory started. "Someone tried to kill Mr. Darrow? Whatever for?"

"Good question. Is there anybody who would stand to gain if both of you were dead?"

"I—I can't think of anyone."

"How about somebody who wants to sabotage the play?"

"No, I . . . I just don't know . . ."

Mallory seemed almost as shaken up by the news of the attempt on Darrow's life as he had been by the attack on himself. Shayne said, "All right, Mr. Mallory, I'll get to work on it for you, but until I come up with some results, I'd advise you to

keep one eye looking over your shoulder. Stay in your hotel as much as you can."

"I have to be at the theater tonight —"

"I know that. I'll be there. Leave word with the security people to let me in, okay?"

"Of course. Thank you, Mr. Shayne. I suppose I should write you a check . . ."

"Let's let that go for now. I'll have Lucy draw up a contract and send it over to you. Leave the name of your hotel and your room number with her."

Mallory leaned forward, anxiety etching lines in his thin face. "What are you going to do now?"

Shayne smiled bleakly. "Stir up a little trouble, maybe. See if I can get that gunman shooting at me instead of you."

IV

AFTER MALLORY HAD LEFT, Shayne called out to Lucy, "Bring today's paper in, will you, Angel?"

When he had the *Daily News* spread out on his desk, he turned the pages rapidly until he found what he was looking for — the review of *Spectre on the Noon Train*. It had been given quite a bit of space, since the play was a world premiere, and the review was generally favorable. What Shayne was really looking for, though, was the name of the *News*'s drama critic. When he was

finished with the review, he called Rourke's number at the paper. On the third ring, the phone was picked up and the reporter said, "Rourke."

"It's Mike, Tim. How about meeting me for lunch?"

"Sure. You got something on your mind?"

"Yeah, Darleen Page. You think you could bring her with you?"

Rourke's tone showed surprise. "I don't know, Mike. She's not here at the paper right now, but I can try to get in touch with her. What do you want with a drama critic?"

"Information about some theater people. I'm working for both Darrow and Jonathon Mallory now, trying to find out who's been trying to knock them off."

Rourke gave a low whistle. "So somebody tried for Mallory, too?"

"Right outside my office. I've got some bulletholes in the wall to show for it."

"You think that crazy play's got something to do with it?"

"That's the way it stacks up to me. What about it, Tim, can you get this Page woman for me? Judging from her review, she keeps up with what's going on in the theater world."

"That she does," Rourke agreed. "I'll do what I can, Mike. Beef House at twelve-thirty?"

"Fine." Shayne said goodbye and hung up. He would have plenty of time to call a plasterer and see about getting those bullet-holes fixed.

When he strolled into the Beef House an hour later, Shayne spotted Rourke right away, sitting in his usual booth. Beside the reporter was a handsome woman in her forties, and when Shayne walked up to them. Rourke said, "Hi, Mike. This is Darleen Page. Darleen, this big galoot is Mike Shayne."

Shayne shook hands with the woman as he sat down. Darleen Page said, "I'm happy to meet you, Mr. Shayne. I've heard so much about your exploits from Timothy?"

Shayne grinned. "Is that so, Timothy? I hope you only told her the good parts."

A waiter brought Shayne his usual. After a sip of it, the big detective said, "I asked Tim to bring you here, Ms. Page, because I need to find out about this production of *Spectre on the Noon Train*. Have you heard anything on the grapevine about someone wanting to cause trouble for the play or the people involved in it?"

The drama critic eyed him sharply. She said, "My nose tells me that something's going on here, Mr. Shayne. Timothy didn't tell me why you were interested in this play, but I assume it has

something to do with a case you're on?"

Shayne nodded. "You're right. I'd rather not lay out all the details right now, but there has been some trouble."

"And you suspect that someone is out to sabotage the play?"

"It's a possibility."

Darleen Page shook her head. "No deal. The theater is my beat, and I know you always give any scoops you have to Rourke here. I want this one, if I'm going to help you."

"Hey!" Rourke yelped. "Mike and I have been friends for a long time."

"Maybe so," Darleen smiled, "but I've got what Mr. Shayne wants right now."

"Make it Mike," Shayne said. "And you can have the story, if you can help me."

Rourke started to protest again, saw that it wouldn't do any good, and subsided into his drink. Darleen Page said, "All right. Without knowing any more than I do about what you're working on, I can say this much for sure: I don't know of anyone outside the production who would have a reason to wish it ill."

"You said outside the production. What about those inside?" Shayne asked.

Darleen nodded. "That's another story. If I were looking for a troublemaker, Mike, I'd start with Malcolm Porter."

Shayne's bushy red eyebrows

went up. "Porter? I thought he wrote the play. Why would he want to ruin the opening run?"

"He wrote it, all right, but he's fought tooth and nail against the other people involved. Malcolm Porter is not the easiest person to get along with anyway, and he has a reputation as a man who picks fights and holds onto a grudge for dear life. He doesn't like some of the changes that Jonathon Mallory made in the play, and word has it that the two of them almost came to blows over it during rehearsals. He doesn't like Jernigan, doesn't trust him, he says, to be honest about the profits. And he never wanted to open here in Miami, so I'd say he's unhappy with Bernard Darrow, too."

"Would he kill over those differences?" Shayne asked quietly.

Darleen Page gasped. "You mean we're talking about attempted murder?"

"Not for publication, we're not."

Darleen looked like her fingers were itching for a typewriter. "This could make a hell of a story, Mike —"

"When I'm ready," Shayne said flatly.

Rourke smiled synically. "When you play ball with this guy, Darleen, you play by his rules."

The critic spent several seconds looking frustrated, then suddenly

said, "Well, all right, if that's the way it is. I'll be waiting for this story, though, Mike, and you'd better not give it to anybody else first."

"You'll be the first one I call," Shayne promised. "One more thing. Is Porter in town?"

"He's renting a cottage over in Miami Beach. I went out there to interview him. I'll give you the address."

Rourke asked, "Could we order now? If I don't get a story, I at least want a good meal out of this!"

"It's on me," Shayne smiled.

The rest of the meal passed pleasantly. Shayne turned aside a couple of further attempts by Darleen Page to probe for more information. Shayne liked the drama critic; like Rourke, she wasn't the type to give up when she smelled a story.

When they were finished, Shayne signed the tab, said goodbye and thanks to Rourke and Darleen Page, and headed for his car. The next stop on his schedule was a visit to the angry playwright Malcolm Porter.

It took him a little over a half hour to cross Biscayne Bay and locate the cottage where Porter was living. The house was on a quiet side street, not too far from the beach. There was a palm tree in the front yard. Shayne reflected that if he was a writer, this would be a nice place to work.

He parked at the curb and went

up the walk to the small front porch. Before ringing the bell, he stood there for a moment and listened to the sounds coming through the open windows.

He could hear the staccato clatter of a typewriter, going in stops and starts. During the pauses when the typewriter was silent, the sound of muttering drifted to his ears. Porter was home, there was no doubt about that.

Shayne punched the buzzer and heard it shrilling inside the cottage. When he released it, the man inside yelled, "Don't want any! Go away!"

"Mr. Porter?" Shayne called back.

"I said go-away!"

Shayne made his voice a little harsher. "This is police business!" he said, which was certainly the truth. "Open up!"

He could hear Porter approaching the door, could hear oaths and grumbles. The door was jerked open, and Malcolm Porter snapped, "All right, what is it?"

Shayne took a second to appraise one of America's leading dramatists. Porter wore ragged shorts on his muscular legs and a torn tee shirt. Shayne reached back into his memory and pulled out something from a movie he had once seen.

"Trying out for the part of Stanley Kowalski?" he asked.

Porter's flushed face twisted in a sneer. "Just what I needed, a

damn funny cop! What do you want?"

"My name's Mike Shayne, and I'm investigating a couple of attempted murders."

"Who got killed?"

"Nobody yet, but the attempts were on Bernard Darrow and Jonathon Mallory."

Porter let out a hoarse bray of a laugh. "Well, whoever's doing it, more power to 'em! Those guys don't give a damn about art, and I don't give a damn about them!"

"Could we talk about this inside?" Shayne asked tightly.

Porter squared his shoulders. "I don't see why. Listen, Shayne, I'm working, so why don't you beat it? Go bother somebody else."

"I'd rather talk to you," Shayne said in a flat voice, "since I've heard that you're no friend of Darrow and Mallory."

Understanding dawned on Porter's face. Repeating his laugh, he said, "That's rich! You think I had something to do with trying to kill those bastards? Forget it; Shayne. Just get the hell out of here."

"Not yet."

Porter's eyes were slightly bleary, and Shayne could tell that he had been drinking. Slowly, Porter said, "I am wrestling with a bitch of a second act, Shayne, so if you don't leave me alone, I'm going to get angry."

"Then tell me where you were

after the performance last night and where you were this morning."

"I was here," Porter said irritably. "I left before the third act last night because I couldn't stand to see what Mallory was doing to my play. And I was asleep this morning, right up until noon."

"You were alone?"

"That's right. I don't like what you're getting at, Shayne. You're checking out my alibi, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Shayne said, "and you haven't got much of one."

Porter glared and said, "By God, I don't like you, Shayne."

"I don't give a damn what you like," Shayne bit off.

Porter's face twisted again and the man lunged forward, looping a fist toward Shayne's head. Shayne ducked, letting the blow sail by him, and brought his left fist hard into Porter's stomach. Breath whooped out of Porter's lungs.

Shayne stepped back, content to let it go at that, but Porter came at him again, arms swinging. Shayne blocked one punch, but he must have underestimated Porter, because one fist got through and bounced off his chin. Rocked off balance by the blow, Shayne almost fell on the walk.

He didn't intend to stand there and trade blows with a drunken, belligerent writer. Taking a punch on his left forearm, Shayne

stepped in and crossed a hard right to Porter's jaw. The man took two fast steps backward and sat down suddenly.

He stayed sitting, shaking his head groggily, as Shayne said, "All right, Porter, you can go back to your second act now. But remember, I'll be watching out for Mallory and Darrow, and if you are the one trying to kill them, you won't get away with it. I don't think you'd find the writing conditions too good in prison." Shayne paused. "Second acts would be the least of your worries."

Leaving Porter sitting there, Shayne stalked back to his car.

V

WHEN SHAYNE WENT BACK to his office a little later, he found someone waiting for him.

The man sitting in a chair in front of Lucy's desk wore work clothes, and he was chuckling at something Lucy had said. He stood up as Shayne came in and turned around to face him.

"Michael," Lucy said, "this is Mr. Calzone. I think he has some information for you."

Shayne could see now that the man was tall and thin, with a look of whipcord strength about him. His hair was mostly white, and his skin looked like old leather, but his blue eyes had a sparkle to them. He extended a callused hand for Shayne to shake, then

said, "Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Shayne. I'm Antonio Calzone."

"Mr. Calzone," Shayne nodded. "What can I do for you?"

"I think maybe I can do something for you. You've been asking around about Bernie Darrow?"

Shayne exchanged a quick glance with Lucy. "That's right."

"Well, I knew him when. I'd be glad to tell you about it."

Shayne opened the door to the inner office. "Come on in. Could we get you anything, a drink or some coffee?"

"No, thanks."

Shayne waited until Calzone was seated in the comfortable chair in front of the desk, then lowered his rangy frame into his own chair. To get things rolling, he asked, "Are you and Darrow old friends?"

Calzone shook his head. "Not really. I used to know him in New York. We were in the same line of work, I guess you could say."

"Were you rivals?"

"No." Calzone was emphatic. "There's no bad blood between us, Shayne. I've got no ax to grind, and I don't have any reason to cover up for him. I haven't even had any contact with him since he came down here to Florida. We move in different circles. He fancies himself a rich retired businessman, and me, I'm just a fisherman, doing what I like. But I could tell you some stories about the old days, when things were different."

"That's what I want," Shayne said. "I suppose there were a lot of people who wouldn't have minded seeing Darrow dead."

Calzone snorted. "You got the rest of the afternoon? If you do, I could tell you most of their names."

"What about now? Do you know of anyone who might be holding an old grudge against Darrow? Somebody who's just getting around to paying off an old debt?" Shayne knew he couldn't ignore that angle of the case, despite his theory that the attacks on Mallory and Darrow were related.

Calzone leaned back, crossed his legs, and stroked his grizzled chin. After a moment of deliberation, he said. "I don't think so, Shayne. I'll be honest with you. Big Bernie Darrow ran numbers and girls mostly, and he and his partner were also in charge of laundering a lot of money. Twenty years ago, he had a lot of power in New York, and you can't have power without having enemies. Some of it was personal, some of it was just people who were ambitious and wanted to take over Bernie's spot. Like I said, twenty years ago, I could have spent hours telling you about people who had it in for Darrow. But not now."

"What happened?"

Calzone shrugged. "Attrition. Most of those people are dead now, Shayne. The kind of life they led, it's no surprise. I got out early

and came down here to live the kind of life I always wanted anyway, out in the sun, on the water. When I saw my friends and relatives being gunned down and blown up, I decided it was time I turned my back on that way of life."

Shayne nodded. "So you'd say that most of Darrow's enemies are gone now?"

The old fisherman spread his hands. "I can't say that for sure, I don't stay in touch maybe as good as I should. But I'd say it's a good bet."

Shayne leaned back, tugging gently on his earlobe, as he considered what Calzone had told him. The information only reinforced his idea that Malcolm Porter's play was the catalyst that had brought on the murder attempts, rather than something in Darrow's past. It wouldn't hurt to try to pick up a few more tidbits from the gangster-turned-fisherman, though.

"You mentioned Darrow's partner," Shayne said. "I didn't know he had one."

Calzone nodded and said, "Herman Solomon. He started out as a courier for the organization, worked his way up to being a bookkeeper, and then became Darrow's partner when Bernie took on the laundering operation. Herman was a wizard with numbers, from what I heard. I never knew him very well."

"What happened to him?"

The dark skin of Calzone's forehead furrowed into a frown. "That's strange," he said. "I was asking myself that same question earlier, when I decided to come see you. I heard a guy in a bar saying that you wanted to know about Darrow, and I know you got a good reputation. So I thought I'd pay you a visit, and I tried to organize everything in my head before I got here. But I could never come up with what happened to Herman Solomon. I remember there was some stink about him, Shayne, but I'm sorry to say that's all I can remember."

Shayne's own brow creased. This business about Darrow's partner would bear some checking out, if only to be sure that all the angles of the case were covered.

He said, "I appreciate you coming in, Mr. Calzone —"

"Tony."

"Tony. As I said, I appreciate it."

"Listen, if you don't mind my asking, what have you got going here? Is Darrow in some kind of trouble?"

Shayne nodded. He liked this old man and didn't see any reason not to tell him.

"Somebody took a shot at Darrow last night, wounded one of his men. He thinks it was somebody from the old days, trying to even a score, and he wants me to find out who." Shayne didn't say anything about his further theory involving

Mallory and the play.

Calzone shook his head solemnly. "Bernie may be right, but I don't think so. As far as I know, none of the people from the old days in New York are anywhere near here. There aren't that many of us left, like I said. Still, if anybody can dig out a murderer, it's probably you, Shayne. I've heard nothing but praise for your abilities." A wry smile put more lines in the old man's face. "Of course, some of the young turks who consider this their territory now don't always take kindly to what you do."

Shayne chuckled. He had had his share of run-ins with the Miami mob, all right, and so far he had come out on top. There was almost a grudging respect for him on the part of some of Miami's underworld figures.

"I don't always agree with them, either," Shayne said to Calzone. "Sure you won't join me in a drink?"

"I think perhaps I will, after all."

"Cognac?"

"Fine."

Shayne took a bottle of Martell and two clean tumblers from his filing cabinet and poured the drinks. Calzone eyed the bottle and said, "You have good taste, my friend, in cognac as well as secretaries. Miss Hamilton is lovely."

"I've always thought so,"

Shayne agreed. "What shall we drink to?"

"How about crime? Calzone suggested, and his blue eyes were twinkling again.

When the old fisherman had left, after Shayne expressed his gratitude again, the big redhead picked up the phone and dialed Rourke's number for the third time that day. The city editor answered and informed him that Rourke had left a little earlier. A call to Rourke's apartment turned up the reporter, though.

"Hello, Tim," Shayne said when Rourke answered. "I've got another favor to ask you."

"Hah!" Rourke ejaculated. "After the way you doublecrossed me and promised the story to Darleen Page? You've got to be kidding, Mike! She's a drama critic, not a top-notch reporter like me. Haven't I always done you justice in my stories?"

"Well, yeah," Shayne admitted, "but she had me over a barrel, Tim. There wasn't much I could do about it."

"I'd like to put you in a barrel—"

"Whoa, boy! You can vent your spleen some other time. How about this? I only promised to give Darleen the story first. I didn't say anything about not giving it to you second. And you can type pretty fast when you have to, can't you?"

There was a moment's silence on the other end, then Rourke

said, "You devious Irishman. You cover all the bases, don't you, Mike?"

"I try to. I like staying alive."

"What is it you need?"

Calzone's story about Bernard Darrow's partner had made Shayne curious about the fate of Herman Solomon. He outlined the story quickly for Rourke, then asked, "Don't you have some contacts on the New York papers who might be able to find out what happened to Solomon?"

"Yeah, I should be able to get something. But do you really think that this could have something to do with the case you're on?"

"I don't see how right at the moment, but you never know. I don't like questions I don't have answers to, you know that."

"Okay," Rourke said. "I'll make some calls up north and see what I can come up with, but it may take a little time."

"No hurry."

"Listen, Mike, you be sure and get in touch with me as soon as you've talked to Darleen."

"Will do, Tim," Shayne promised. "Talk to you later."

He hung up, looked at his watch, and considered his next move. It was the middle of the afternoon now, and this might be a good time to check out the Suncoast Playhouse. He planned on being there for the evening's performance of *Spectre on the Noon Train*, so that he could keep

an eye on Jonathon Mallory, and he knew that he needed to be more familiar with the backstage area. He hoped that Darrow would have the sense to stay home, safely ensconced with his guards.

He went into the outer office, picked up his hat, and leaned a hip on the corner of Lucy's desk. "I'm going over to the theater now, Angel," he said. "I want to look around, get to know the place a little better if I'm going to be protecting Mallory while he's there. You can get hold of me there for the next couple of hours if you need me."

"You'll be going to the play tonight?" Lucy asked.

"Yeah, tonight and tomorrow night and as long as it takes me to clear this mess up. I've got a feeling I'm going to get sick of Malcolm Porter's deathless dialogue."

He gave her a quick kiss and then headed for the theater.

VI

THERE WAS NO PROBLEM about getting into the theater, since Mallory had done as Shayne had told him, calling the theater and telling the guard to expect the big redhead detective. Shayne spent an hour and a half going over every nook and cranny of the Suncoast Playhouse. He knew that there would be quite a bit of confusion backstage during the performance, and he wanted to

be able to keep an eye on the spots where an assassin would be most likely to station himself. Mallory would be in the wings most of the time, and Shayne knew he would have to watch the areas that commanded a good view of Mallory's position. That included the corridors running backstage to the dressing rooms, and also the catwalks high above the stage.

When he was satisfied that he knew the place as well as he was going to, Shayne left the theater and went back to his apartment. A quick shower and shave refreshed him, and he ate a light snack before going out again.

It was six o'clock, a full two hours before curtain time, when he arrived at the theater again. There were a few more people around now, technicians getting the lights and sets ready for the performance. The place had been echoingly empty when he was there earlier, and it had been almost a little spooky.

Shayne took a quick walk through the backstage area, then checked out the auditorium itself. Some of the actors were starting to drift in now, along with the costumers and make-up artists.

Shayne was striding along the corridor lined with dressing rooms when one of the doors opened. A woman whom he recognized as Lynne Barrett looked out and said, "Hello. I don't think I've seen you around here before."

Pausing, Shayne said, "Security consultant, Miss Barrett. Just a routine check."

"Oh," The actress nodded. "I guess you need to come in here and look around, then."

Before he could answer, she stepped back and opened the door wide. Shayne's eyebrows quirked. Lynne Barrett was wearing a dressing gown that was rather thin and came only to the tops of her lush thighs.

There was no denying that she was a beautiful woman, Shayne thought. Auburn hair fell to her shoulders, and the thin gown was clinging to an enticing figure. Her full lips were slightly parted as she smiled at him, and he gave a mental shrug. He wasn't immune to such charms, not by any means, but evn if she was bent on seducing him, he thought he could keep the situation under control. Besides, it might be an opportunity to find out some backstage gossip, and there was no telling what might come in handy in this case.

As he stepped into the room, Lynne said, "Is something wrong? Why is a security consultant looking around a theater?"

"Like I said, it's just a routine check."

"Well, feel free to look at anything in the room." The tone of her voice told him that she meant exactly what she said.

"Have you seen the play?" she asked.

"I attended the opening last night."

She clapped her hands together in joy. "Really? What did you think of me?"

"You were very good," Shayne lied. Actually, he hadn't been paying close enough attention to rate her performance.

"You really think so? That's sweet of you, Mr. . . .?"

"Shayne, Mike Shayne."

"Mike Shayne," she repeated.

"It seems like I've heard that name somewhere before. I wonder where," she mused. As she spoke, she moved closer to him, until she was less than a foot away, looking up at him with brown eyes. He could smell the delicate fragrance of the perfume she was wearing.

And then almost before he knew what was happening, she had her arms around his neck and was kissing him, pressing her lips to his with savage abandon and moving her warm body sensuously against him. His arms went around her instinctively, pulling her tighter as he returned the kiss. He could feel his own blood start to pound as he ran his hands up and down her back. It was time to call a halt to this sudden explosion of lust, Shayne told himself doggedly, before it got out of hand.

Lynne wasn't having such an overwhelming affect on him that he didn't hear the dressing room door open behind them, however. He released her as the door

swung open and a voice cried out, "Lynne! Dammit, what's going on here?"

Thoughts of the old badger game were the first things to go through Shayne's head as he turned to face Aaron Havens. If that was what they had in mind, it wasn't going to work this time, since he didn't give a damn who knew he was kissing Lynne Barrett.

As Havens stalked toward him, though, Shayne saw that he was wrong. The florid face of the actor revealed genuine anger as he snapped, "You slut! You'll go after anything, won't you?"

"Now hold on," Shayne grated. "There's no call to talk like that, Havens."

"Who the hell are you?" Havens demanded.

"Mike Shayne, if it's any of your business."

"It is," Havens said grimly. "Say goodnight, Shayne."

He launched an overhand punch toward Shayne's face that the redhead avoided easily. Lynne exclaimed, "Aaron, stop it! Stop it or I'll scream!"

"Go ahead," Havens told her, setting himself for another attack on Shayne. "I told you you wouldn't get away with dumping me. You and this big bastard will both pay!"

Shayne moved fluidly to one side as Havens swung again. So far, Shayne had been content to dodge the punches. He didn't

want to do any damage to the infuriated actor unless he had to.

"Take it easy." Shayne advised. "I'm not out to steal the lady from you, Havens, but if she's not interested in you anymore, why fight it?"

Havens just growled out his rage and drove a fist at Shayne's head. Shayne started to duck again, not expecting any trickery from Havens, and ran right into an uppercut. He had to take a step backward to retain his balance, and Havens moved in speedily, trying to take advantage of the opportunity. He hit Shayne twice, once in the stomach and once just over the heart, before Shayne got his feet under him again and lost his patience.

A big knobby fist whistled through the air of the dressing room and smashed into Haven's jaw. The actor sailed backward and came up with a crash against the wall. Lynne let out a little scream and cried, "Not his face, Mike! If you mark him, he won't be able to go on!"

Shayne put the brakes on a second punch that would have in all likelihood flattened Havens' nose. He growled, "Then get him out of there. I don't like guys who keep swinging at me when I tell them not to!"

Lynne took the arm of the now-groggy Havens and ushered him out of the dressing room in a hurry. When she came back to Shayne and tried to step into his

arms again, he shook his head. "Your friend disrupted things too much, Miss Barrett. I've got to get on about my business."

She all but stamped her foot in exasperation. "Oh, damn that Aaron! He's always messing things up. I wish he'd just accept the fact that it's over between us. Just because we were lovers once doesn't make me his property, now and forevermore!"

"If he's such a troublemaker, why does Mallory put up with him?" Shayne asked.

"He's a good actor," Lynne admitted grudgingly. "Just because you don't like a person doesn't mean you can't work with him."

Shayne nodded and said, "I'll probably be around for a while, Miss Barrett, so I'll talk to you later."

The purr came back into her voice. "Make it, Lynne. And don't forget where we were when we were interrupted, Mike."

"I won't," he promised, and then went out, shutting the door behind him.

Havens wasn't lurking anywhere in the hall, for which Shayne was thankful. He went down the corridor, knocked on the door of Monica Stevenson's dressing room, and smiled when the blonde opened the door. She smiled back and said, "Why, hello, Mike. What are you doing here? Is Lucy with you?"

"I'm afraid not," he said. "As

for what I'm doing here, I'm working on a case. Two cases, really, that may be the same one."

"Cryptic but interesting," Monica said. "If you've got the time, why don't you come in and tell me about it?"

"I thought I'd do just that."

Shayne filled Monica in quickly on what had happened since the shooting in the parking lot the night before. When he was finished, she said, "How horrible! I can't see why anyone would want to kill either Jonathon or Mr. Darrow. Is there any way I can help you?"

"That's why I came to see you. How about having dinner with me after the show?"

Monica frowned prettily. "But what about Lucy? I mean, I wouldn't want her to think that I was after you."

Shayne laughed. "Don't worry. I'm talking about a strictly business dinner. I want you to tell me everything you know about everyone in the company, cast and crew alike. Think you can do that?"

"I suppose so. Will that help?"

"You never know what will help. The more I know about everyone involved in a case, the better my chance of cracking it."

"All right. Meet you back here after the performance?"

"Fine," Shayne nodded. He gave her another smile and went back out into the hall.

She was a lovely girl, Shayne

mused, but she and Lucy were old friends, so it would have to be strictly hands off.

He was thinking along those lines when he heard raised voices coming from the wings. One of them belonged to Jonathon Mallory, and the other sounded like Malcolm Porter. Shayne hurried down the hall toward the commotion.

"You've turned my play into a pile of garbage!" Porter shouted. As Shayne came onto the scene, the playwright was gesticulating wildly in front of a haggard Mallory, who was showing the strain of the day's events.

"All I've done was try to clarify the relationships between the characters," Mallory explained wearily. The director was wearing a coat and carrying a small briefcase, and he had obviously just arrived at the theater.

"You're going to have to restore all my original dialogue," Porter declared. "I'm not going to let this farce go on any longer. I shudder to think what would happen if we were to take this show to Broadway right now!"

"So do I," Mallory said quietly. "That's why we're working the kinks out of it here in Miami. It'll be all right, Malcolm you'll see. Now, if you'll excuse me . . ."

He turned and started to walk away. Shayne had stayed back, in the shadow of some cables, keeping a close eye on the exchange but not wanting to inter-

fere just yet. If Porter was indeed behind the murder attempts, he might let something slip in his anger.

But now, as Mallory turned his back, the playwright's face contorted and he suddenly hurled himself at the director.

Shayne sprang forward, grabbing Porter's arm. "Hold it!" he rapped. Mallory turned back around in surprise.

Porter said, "Shayne! Let me go, dammit! This isn't any of your business."

"It's my business if you were planning to jump Mallory here," Shayne said. "You're not very smart for a famous author, Porter; you're making me more suspicious of you all the time."

Porter tore his arm out of Shayne's grasp and sneered. "Still doing that tired bit, Shayne? You still think I'm a killer? Well, you're crazy, as crazy as this miserable excuse for a director here!"

With a baleful glare, Porter turned on his heel and stalked off. Shayne let him go, his gray eyes watching the man intently. Mallory heaved a deep sigh and shook his head. "I'm glad you were here, Mr. Shayne," he said. "I'm not much of a fighter, and I think Porter was determined that we come to blows."

"I think you're right. He was spoiling for a fight, that's for sure. Has he always been such a bastard?"

Mallory nodded. "He's a terror and always has been. I've been around the theater for a little over twenty years myself, and the Malcolm Porter horror stories are legion. The critics love his work, though, and he's always been successful. So we have to put up with him. Did — did you say something about you thinking he was a killer?"

"It's a possibility," Shayne grated. "He's no friends of yours, or Darrow's either. And he doesn't have a good alibi for the times in question."

Mallory was pale. "I never expected things like this to happen when I signed to do this play. You're going to stay through the performance?"

"That's right. And as soon as it's over, you're going back to your hotel."

"You'll get no argument from me, Mr. Shayne. I hope you can get all this squared away."

Shayne shook his head, baring his teeth in a grimace. "Considering the things that are going on around here between all you people, I'm surprised there haven't been any murders already!"

VII

THE PLAY WENT OFF smoothly again, which was a surprise to Shayne, knowing as he did the problems that had plagued the

production. There was no sign of the antagonism between Lynne Barrett and Aaron Havens, and Jonathon Mallory seemed to be perfectly safe as he stood in the wings, watching intently and giving hand signals to his actors at times.

Shayne floated, keeping an eye on the entire backstage area. All the activity that went on there during the play was a revelation to Shayne; he hadn't realized that so much went into the production of a play.

He watched Mallory even when the play was over, but it was beginning to look as if there would be no more attempts on his life this day. Shayne was glad of that.

Havens and Lynne Barret both gave him intent looks as they came backstage following their bows, Lynne's touched with curiosity and Havens' with hostility. Both of them had to be wondering why he was hanging around there, since neither of them knew who and what he really was.

Shayne waited near the door of Monica's dressing room until the blond actress arrived in her hoop-skirted costume. She said, "Hello again. How was it tonight?"

"Looks a lot different from back here than it does from out there," Shayne said. "You were very good again, though, from any angle."

"Thank you. It won't take me long to change."

"That's all right. I've got

something to do before we leave, anyway. See you in a few minutes."

He went over to Mallory and said, "All right, let's put you in a cab and get you back to your hotel."

The director nodded wearily. "That sounds good to me, Mr. Shayne. I don't particularly want to stay around here."

The two of them went out the stage door entrance, Shayne first so that he could take a quick look around. Everything on the street looked normal, so he whistled for a cab.

Putting Mallory into the back seat of the taxi, Shayne told him, "Go Straight to the hotel and stay there until you hear from me. I don't expect any trouble, but keep your eyes open anyway, all right?"

"You can count on that," Mallory assured him.

Shayne stood there for a moment, watching the taillights of the cab dwindle, then turned and went back into the theater.

Monica was ready when he got back to her dressing room. She had changed into a simple blue dress with a high slit, and she looked lovely.

Shayne linked her arm with his and said, "I'm going to have to keep reminding myself that this dinner is strictly business."

"Me, too," she said softly.

Shayne was intensely aware of her presence as he drove toward a

restaurant near Biscayne Bay. He recognized chemistry when he felt it, and he knew what might have developed if both of them hadn't been so close to Lucy.

The meal was excellent, the company pleasant, and Shayne allowed himself to enjoy it for a time before launching into the real reason for this meeting. Finally, over brandy and coffee, he said, "All right, since this is a business dinner, we'd better get to work. I need to know anything and everything you can tell me about the members of the company."

"Starting with whom?" Monica asked.

"How about Bernard Darrow?" Monica shook her head. "I'm sorry, Mike. I don't know anything about Darrow, except that he's putting up the money for the production. If everything goes well, I think he's planning on backing it all the way to Broadway. I hope I can stay with it that long. I've never been on Broadway."

"You'll make it," Shayne smiled. "Let's move on to Malcolm Porter."

She rolled her eyes in distress. "That man! I think everybody involved with the play dislikes him. If only he didn't write such successful plays!"

"Has he given you any trouble personally?"

"Only telling me how to play every line, regardless of what Jonathon says. He's never made a

pass at me or anything, if that's what you mean. I think he's more interested in alienating people. Now, Aaron is a different story."

"Meaning what?"

"I mean that he does nothing but make passes, at me and at all the other girls."

Shayne's craggy brow creased in a frown. "I thought he had something going on with Lynne Barrett."

"He used to, from what I've heard, but even while that was happening, he was after every girl he could find, behind Lynne's back, of course. She dropped him when she finally found out about it, and I don't think he took it very well. Seems to me he doesn't have anything to complain about, though."

"It sounds like this play hasn't been a very pleasant experience for you," Shayne commented.

"Oh, no!" Monica exclaimed. "It's been wonderful, because I got to work with Jonathon. He's such a great director, and this is my first opportunity to work with him."

Shayne thought he detected a note of something more in her voice than just admiration for Mallory's skills as a director. He kept quiet, letting Monica's enthusiasm for the subject carry the conversation.

"I think I've learned more about acting and drama in the few weeks we've been together than I did in all my acting classes put together.

Jonathon has a reputation as an actor's director, you know, I suppose it's because he started out as a actor himself."

"He did? I didn't know that."

Monica nodded. "Yes, he was on Broadway when he was twenty. I — I've even got stories about his career in my scrapbook."

Shayne smiled gently. "Sounds like he's quite a hero to you."

"Well . . ." For a moment, Shayne thought she was actually going to blush. "He's a great man, one of the best directors in the theater. And he could have been a great actor . . ." Her voice trailed off as a look of sadness crossed her face.

"What happened?" Shayne asked, knowing full well that there was a story behind what she had said.

"His wife died. She was killed, murdered."

Shayne's fingers tightened on his snifter of brandy. This was the first time he had heard of violence in Mallory's past. He said, "Tell me about it."

"Jonathon was a young actor at the time, playing his first lead in a Broadway show. He had worked so hard at it, spent so many long hours rehearsing and in classes, and then that had to happen and ruin everything. Helen, that was Jonathon's wife, had come to the theater that evening and was waiting for him outside the stage door. Someone — the police never found out who — attacked

her and strangled her. It devastated Jonathon, of course."

"The cops never caught the killer?"

"No. They said it was probably an attempted mugging, and that the robber got scared when Helen fought back and strangled her to keep her quiet. After it happened, Jonathon dropped out of the show and went back to his home town in Illinois. He was out of the theater for almost a year after that, but he made a comeback, only as a director instead of an actor. He did some shows in Chicago and wound up back on Broadway eventually."

"Quite a story," Shayne said.

"It's a tragedy. Jonathon had everything to look forward to before it happened."

"He seems to have made a good life for himself, though. Did he ever remarry?"

"No. I don't think he's ever loved anyone since Helen."

Shayne nodded thoughtfully. He was glad that Monica had told him the story, although he didn't see how it could have any bearing on the present case. It gave him some insight into the director's background, though, and that could prove to be valuable.

He sipped his brandy and said, "What about the other people in the show, and the crew? Is there any reason any of them would be holding a grudge against Mallory or Darrow, or against the production in general?"

"I can't think of anything." Monica spent the next few minutes giving him brief sketches of the other people involved in the production, and none of them seemed to have the slightest hint of a motive for murder.

They finished their drinks, and Shayne said, "I'd better get you back to your hotel. It's getting kind of late."

Her soft fingers closed down on his hand. "I enjoyed it, Mike, even if I didn't help you any."

His face creased in a grin. "So did I."

He paid the check and drove her back to her hotel, the same one where Mallory and the other members of the company were staying. As he pulled up to the curb in front of it, he said, "I'll walk you up to your room."

She shook her head. "Not necessary. I'm a big girl. Mike . . . since that business dinner is over, do you think one kiss would hurt?"

He didn't want to stop to think about it, He said, "I can't see how it would," and then his arms were around her and her soft lips were clinging to his. After a moment, she moved her lips away and whispered, "What might have been can be nice, too. Good night, Mike."

"Good night, Monica."

As she started to get out of the car, she paused, looked back at him, and said, "I hope you find out who's trying to kill Jonathon."

"So do I," Shayne said.

VIII

SHAYNE CHECKED his watch as he drove away from the hotel. It was only a little after midnight, and on impulse, he decided to drive out to Darrow's house and check in with the former mobster. He was still curious about the partner that Antonio Calzone had mentioned, but any questions about that would have to wait until he had talked to Tim Rourke again. Shayne hoped Rourke's New York contacts would be able to supply some information on that score.

Lights were on in Darrow's house, as Shayne had expected there would be. He pulled up in front of the gate and got out to use the phone line to the house.

As he reached for it, a voice came out of the darkness. "Hold it, bud. Just stay still."

The voice was cold and hard, and Shayne did like it told him to do. A streetlight down the block cast a dim light on the scene, but the illumination was bright enough for Shayne to see the dark-suited man who came out of the shadows. The man was carrying a pump shotgun and looked like he knew how to use it. He studied Shayne through the wrought iron gate for long seconds, then said in that graveyard voice, "What do you want?"

"I'd like to see Mr. Darrow," Shayne replied, keeping his face calm and emotionless. "The name

is Mike Shayne."

Never taking his eyes from Shayne, the guard reached into his back pocket and pulled out a little walkie-talkie. Into it, he said, "Guy named Shayne wants to see the boss. Big redhead bozo. How about it?"

The walkie-talkie squawked back, and evidently the man made some sense of its noise, because he lowered the shotgun slightly and pushed a button inside the gate. The two sections started to swing open slowly.

"Okay, Shayne," the guard said. "Get in your car and drive on up to the house. Don't try to stop and get out before you get there, though. You'll get blown away if you do."

Shayne nodded curtly and proceeded on up the drive. Stopping directly in front of the door, he got out. The door opened as he strode toward it.

Another hard-faced man led him into the house. Darrow may have been retired, Shayne reflected, but he still had soldiers in his army.

There was no sign of Gloria Darrow. The man who had met him at the door took him down the hall toward the den where Shayne had met with Darrow earlier. They went past that door this time, however, and out through glass doors onto a patio. It was dark back here, but Shayne could see Darrow sitting at a redwood table and sipping a drink. It was a warm

night, and Darrow was wearing pajamas and a robe.

The man from New York nodded and said, "Hello, Shayne. What is it you want to see me about? Have you found out who's trying to kill me?"

"Not yet," Shayne said. "Some other things have come up, though. The main reason I came out here was to see if you were all right, and if there had been any more attempts."

Darrow shook his head. "All has been calm and peaceful. Would you like a drink? I was just out here enjoying the night and the stars."

"No, thanks."

"What's this about other things coming up?"

Shayne decided to be blunt about it. "Somebody's trying to kill Jonathon Mallory, too. Do you know why anyone would want him dead?"

"Mallory? Somebody's trying to kill my director? Why, Shayne? That doesn't make sense."

Without asking, Shayne sat down on the other side of the table from Darrow. The soldier who had led him out here was standing beside the doors into the house, keeping watch over his charge. Shayne said, "Is there any connection between you and Mallory besides the play?"

"No. I never even met the man until last night. All of my dealings have been with Jernigan, the producer. I knew of Mallory's work,

of course, before I agreed with Jernigan to hire him."

"Then we have two possibilities. *One* is that the same person is trying to hit both you and Mallory, for some unknown reason. *Two* is that we have two separate would-be killers, with two different motives."

"Which way are you leaning?" Darrow asked.

"I think there has to be a connection," Shayne said, "and the only one there seems to be is the play. It has to tie in with the production some way."

Darrow nodded abruptly. "Malcolm Porter," he declared. "Porter has never gotten along with anyone else connected with this show. Why, some of the things he's said to me would have gotten him into a lot of trouble in the old days. I tell you, Shayne, I wouldn't put anything past him when he's in one of his drunken rages."

"I know what you mean," Shayne agreed. "He took a punch at me earlier when I was trying to question him, and then I had to stop him from jumping Mallory at the theater. He's my number one suspect at the moment, but I haven't been able to come up with anything concrete yet."

"I'm sure you will."

Shayne looked around for a moment, then said, "You seem to be well-guarded here. I met one of your watchdogs out at the gate."

"Yes, that was George. He's a good man, one of my friends from a long time back. He roves the grounds at night. It's what he's good at, and what he likes."

"He's not too polite."

Darrow laughed. "That's George. He is very efficient, but he'll never win any awards for friendliness."

Shayne stood up. "I think I'll call it a night. I'll be in touch if I find out anything for sure."

"And I'll let you know if anything happens here." Darrow stood, too, and held out his hand to Shayne.

The blast of the shotgun boomed through the night.

The next few seconds were a blur of action. The guard by the doors flung himself forward, grabbing Darrow and bearing him to the ground, covering his employer's body with his own. Shayne spun toward the still-echoing sound of the shot. It had come from the side of the house, and Shayne ran cautiously in that direction, snatching out his gun as he ran.

Before he reached the corner of the house, two more shots rang out, but these came from a much smaller gun, a pistol from the sound of it. A strangled cry reached Shayne's ears.

He pounded through the shadows, saw a clump of shrubbery, and threw himself down behind it for concealment until he could get the lay of the situation. He saw a

writhing shape on the lawn about twenty feet away, and volatile curses came from it. Shayne recognized the voice of George, the guard with the shotgun.

There hadn't been any shooting for almost thirty seconds. Shayne leaped to his feet and sprinted over to George. Kneeling beside the guard, he rapped, "What happened? Where are you hit?"

"Got me . . . in the damn leg . . ." George gasped. "I saw a guy trying to . . . get over the wall . . . Cut loose with one over his head . . . Bastard turned around and shot me!"

"Did you see where he went?"

"Must've scared him . . . Went back over the wall, sounded like he took off . . . Hell, I think he got my kneecap!"

Shayne squeezed George's shoulder and said grimly, "Hang on. Darrow will have help here plenty fast. I'm going over the wall myself."

Leaving George there, Shayne ran to the brick wall and hoisted himself over it rapidly. He dropped down on the other side and stood still, listening. He thought he could hear running footsteps several blocks away. The gunman, whoever he was, would be hard to catch now.

Shayne spent the next few minutes searching the quiet, darkened neighborhood, with no luck. The would-be killer was long gone. His lead had been too much to overcome. At least he had been

scared off before he could get a shot at Darrow. There was no doubt in Shayne's mind that that had been his intention.

Walking back toward Darrow's, Shayne reflected on the events of the day. It had been hectic, that was for sure, and he wasn't at all comfortable with what he had accomplished so far. The morning would have to include another visit to Porter, and this time he wouldn't even attempt to be polite.

He went back over the wall and was challenged. He dropped to the lawn and called out, "It's Shayne."

Darrow, flanked by two more men, came hurrying up to him. "Did you get him?" Darrow asked.

"No," Shayne said flatly. "He was too far away when I went over the wall. I could never catch up to him. He either holed up somewhere or had a car and got out of the neighborhood. How's George?"

"He'll be all right. He's in the house now, but we've got an ambulance on the way."

Shayne heaved a sigh. "Whoever it was, I don't think he'll try again tonight. Not after the reception he got."

"What will you do?"

"It's one o'clock in the morning," Shayne said. "I'm going to go home and get some sleep and try to straighten this screwy business out tomorrow."

IX

AT NINE-THIRTY the next morning, Shayne was ringing the bell of the little bungalow that Malcolm Porter was renting. He had come directly there from his apartment, after calling Lucy and telling her that he would be late getting to the office.

No one was answering the door, so Shayne leaned on the buzzer and kept it going. Finally, the door was jerked open, and a haggard-looking Malcolm Porter yelled, "My God, don't you know what time it is! Who — Oh, it's you, Shayne. Well, get the hell out of here! Leave me alone!"

Shayne bulled past Porter, who was clad only in his underwear, and stalked into the cottage. The playwright started to yell a protest, but he cut it off when Shayne spun around and fixed him with a cold glare. "I've got some questions, Porter," Shayne snapped, "and this time you're going to answer them straight."

Porter closed his eyes and rubbed his head with both hands. "All right, all right," he groaned. "But have a little pity, okay? I've got a Pulitzer Prize-winning hang-over."

"You didn't show much pity to a man named George last night. He'll never walk properly again, the doctors say."

Porter opened his eyes and stared at Shayne. "What the hell are you talking about?" he de-

manded. "I don't know anybody named George."

"He works for Darrow."

"Ah, the light dawns! Somebody tried to knock off Darrow again, is that it? And you're blaming me, of course." Porter's voice rose. "Listen, goddammit, I'm getting tired of this, Shayne! I don't like Darrow or Mallory or any of that miserable bunch. But I didn't try to kill anybody!"

"You didn't have much of an alibi when I talked to you yesterday."

Porter's bleary eyes brightened. His lips twisted in a triumphant sneer. "Maybe not. But if it was last night that somebody tried to kill Darrow again, then I'm in the clear, Shayne. After I left the theater last night, I went straight to a prosaically-named place called the Biscayne Bar and Grill. That's where I tied on the binge whose results you see before you. How's that for an alibi?"

"Would anybody there remember you?"

Porter snorted. "They should. They threw me out of the place at two o'clock." A worried look suddenly crossed Porter's face. "It wasn't after that when the attempt was made on Darrow, was it?"

"It happened around one," Shayne admitted grudgingly.

Porter shrugged, then winced at the twinge the motion caused in his head. "That lets me off, then."

"It doesn't prove you didn't hire someone to do the job for you while you were setting up an alibi," Shayne pressed.

Porter threw up his hands. "All right, Shayne, that's it! I'm not going to listen to any more of this garbage. Get out of my house, and don't come back unless you're dishing out something besides crap!"

Shayne moved toward the door. He looked back before he went out and said, "The gloves are off now, Porter. If you're behind this, I'm going to nail you."

"Lord spare us from detectives! Listen, Shayne, why don't you stop wasting your time here and go after the guy who really stands to gain if my play closes down?"

"Who's that?"

"Aaron Havens, of course. He'd like nothing better than to see the play close. What better way to assure that than to knock off the angel and the director?"

Shayne glared. "What kind of motive would Havens have?"

"The best one. Money. Right after he signed to do my play, his agent got him the lead in a big-budget science fiction movie. Lots more bucks than doing my play for you yokels. Talk about pearls before swine . . ."

"Wait a minute," Shayne snapped. "Havens wants out of his contract?"

"That's right. And Jernigan and Darrow and Mallory won't go along with him. Mallory didn't

want to lose him for the play; I don't see why not. The man's got no talent . . . He's certainly not worthy of the material."

"Why didn't you tell me this yesterday?"

"You didn't ask me about it. Why the hell should I do your job for you?"

Shayne slammed the door behind him as Porter grimaced and muttered about his poor aching head.

Havens had a suite in the same hotel where Mallory and the others were staying, and Shayne was there in fifteen minutes. He rapped sharply on the door, waiting, and then rapped again.

A sleepy voice came from the other side of the door. "What is it? Who's out there?"

"Mike Shayne."

"Who? . . . Shayne? do I know you?"

"We met last night," Shayne said. "In Lynne Barrett's dressing room."

"Lynne! You — " The door was jerked open. "It is you! What the hell do you want, bothering me at this hour?" Havens was in a rumpled bathrobe, and his condition was fairly disheveled.

Shayne pushed past him into the room. He commented, "You show people don't like to get up before noon, do you?"

"Look, Shayne," Havens bristled, "just tell me what you want, then get the hell out!"

"People keep telling me that,"

Shayne growled, "and I don't like it much. I'm a private detective, and I'm investigating a couple of attempted murders."

Havens looked shocked. "Murder! Who got murdered?"

"I said attempted. And the targets were Bernard Darrow and Jonathon Mallory. What have you got to say to that, Havens?"

"What am I supposed to say? This is the first I've heard about it."

"Then you won't mind telling me where you were last night?"

Havens' eyes widened. "You're accusing me?"

"I hear you've got a good reason for wanting this production to fall apart. Something about a movie deal, right?"

Anger clouded Havens' face. "That damn Porter told you about it, didn't he? He was the only one who knew except Darrow and Jernigan and Mallory. It must have been him!"

"It doesn't matter a damn who told me. Where were you last night?"

Their voices had steadily risen in volume, and suddenly a sleepy female voice asked from the other room, "Who is it, Aaron? What's going on out there?"

Shayne had already recognized the voice, but even if he hadn't, the next second revealed who it belonged to. Lynne Barrett stepped into the doorway, totally nude, and looked out at them in puzzlement.

"I see the two of you patched things up," Shayne commented dryly.

Havens all but ran over to Lynne and snapped, "Get back in there! I'll explain later."

Lynne just had time to say, "Hello, Mike. I didn't know it was you," before Havens put a hand on her bare shoulder and practically shoved her back into the bedroom. He shut the door and turned back to Shayne with a savage look on his face. "There!" he grated. "There's my alibi. We went out for dinner after the performance last night and then came back here. I just got things settled down between the two of us, and I'm not going to let you screw them up again!"

"What restaurant did you go to?"

"Hell, I don't remember the name of it. Wait a minute." Havens went over to a coat that was draped over a chair and dug in the pocket of it. He came up with a piece of paper. "Here! Here's the check. I signed it and charged it to the production."

Shayne took the paper from him and scanned it. It was indeed a carbon of a check for dinner from a well-known restaurant, with Havens' name scrawled at the bottom.

"I'll check this out," Shayne said, holding the paper up.

"You do that. Until then, I'll thank you to leave us in peace."

Shayne nodded and went out,

feeling Havens glowering at his back as he left. As he rode downstairs in the elevator and reclaimed his car from the parking garage, he considered what had happened so far this morning.

He had two alibis to check out, but if he was able to verify both of them, that would only further complicate matters. Porter could have hired someone to do the job for him, as Shayne had suggested, but that might be hard to prove. Havens undoubtedly had an excellent motive, but he might be in the clear, too. That would leave Shayne back where he started, trying to find some connection between Mallory and Darrow besides the play.

As he stopped to wait at a traffic light, Shayne's fingers unconsciously worried his earlobe. As soon as he had gotten back to the office and checked out the two alibis, he would have to give Tim Rourke a call, find out if the lanky reporter had heard anything from his New York sources.

New York . . .

Darrow had been a leading figure in the New York underworld twenty years before, at the same time that Mallory was a promising young actor on Broadway. Supposedly they had never met until the night of the play's premiere, but Shayne had no proof of that beyond what they had told him.

It was a new angle, a way of looking at the case that Shayne

hadn't seen before. The key to this whole business might just be twenty years and several thousand miles away . . .

X

THE FIRST THING Shayne did when he hit the office was tell Lucy what he had uncovered so far. When he was through, she shook her pretty head and said, "I think you've got too many suspects in this case, Michael."

"I think you're right," he said, "I'm going to try to reduce that number, right now." He went on into his office and picked up the phone.

Calls to the restaurant and bar in question proved that Porter and Havens had both been telling the truth. They remembered Porter quite well at the bar, and there was no question of his being there during the time of the attack at Darrow's house. Shayne had a little more trouble at the restaurant, but he located a waiter who had been there the night before and who remembered seeing Havens and Lynne Barrett. To the best of his memory, they had left about one-fifteen.

Shayne had to admit that their alibis held up. Still, they could have hired the job done, either one of them. The more he thought about it, though, the less he believed that. Now that he realized there was a possibility of a *second* connection between Darrow and

Mallory, he wanted to check that out more fully. Maybe Tim Rourke had heard from his friends up north . . .

Shayne was reaching for the phone again to call Rourke when the door swung open and the man in question stood there in person. Rourke sauntered across the room, draped his ungainly form over a chair, and tossed a manilla folder on Shayne's desk.

"My buddies in the Empire State came through with flying colors," he declared. "Seems they had heard of Mike Shayne even up there. I had to promise them part of the story if it has anything to do with Big Bernie Darrow."

"So they still remember him up there?"

"You bet they do. He was good for a lot of copy when his partner got knocked off."

Shayne's bushy red brows went up. "Herman Solomon was killed?"

"That's right. Found stabbed in an alley. The cops never solved it, not officially. They found out later that Solomon had been skimming from Darrow, and they figured that Darrow took care of him personally, but they could never place him on the scene. He didn't have an alibi, but without any concrete evidence, they knew better than to go after him. His high-powered legal eagles would have gotten him off like that." Rourke snapped his fingers.

Shayne picked up the folder and

flipped it open, leaning forward to scan the information intently. Most of it consisted of typed notes that Rourke had taken down over the phone, but there was also a faded newspaper clipping.

Rourke said, "I found the clipping buried in our morgue. The *News* carried the wire service stories for a few days, and the first one had that art with it."

There was a photograph with the story in the clipping, showing an alley that was flood-lit by police lights. A chalk outline showed up on the grimy surface of the alley. The picture was slugged MURDER SCENE, and the caption explained that the body of Herman Solomon, 42, reputed gangland figure, had been found here in this alley one block from Broadway, which ran behind several of the famed theaters.

Shayne's gray eyes got very thoughtful, and his fingers tugged at his earlobe. The picture was starting to clear up, but there were still some pieces missing.

"I know that look," Rourke said. "You've got something, Mike."

"Maybe," Shayne murmured. "I need more information."

He pulled the phone over to him and dialed. It took a moment to get through, but then he heard Monica Stevenson's voice say, "Hello?"

"This is Mike, Monica."

"Hello! How are you, Mike? Have you found out anything more

about the case you're working on?"

"Maybe. I think I know who's been trying to kill Jonathon Mallory, and I think I know who's after Darrow. But I need something from you to confirm it."

"Of course. I'll be glad to do anything I can."

"You mentioned you had some stuff about Mallory in your scrapbook. Do you have the book with you?"

"Yes, I carry it with me. But why—"

"Can you get it?"

"Sure. Just a minute."

She put the phone down, and Shayne looked across the desk at Rourke. The reporter was watching him with narrowed eyes, and Shayne could almost see the wheels turning over in his head.

He heard Monica's voice again. "I've got the book here with me, Mike. What do you need?"

"Find the clippings about Mallory. Do you have anything about his wife's death?"

"Yes, here's one."

"I need to know the date that it happened, and the exact address, if you've got it."

"Let's see . . . Here it is. July 17, 1960."

Shayne's fingers tightened on the receiver. The clipping on his desk about Solomon's murder the night before was dated July 18, 1960.

"And the address?" he asked in a tight voice.

Monica read it off, and Shayne knew he had it. The picture was a crazy one, but all the pieces were there, and they fit. The murders of Helen Mallory and Herman Solomon had taken place at about the same time, less than three blocks apart.

"Thanks, Monica," Shayne said. "I'll let you know how it turns out." *Even though you won't like it*, he added mentally.

Shayne hung up and got to his feet. Rourke bounced up, too, and said, "I've got an idea what you're thinking, Mike, and it's kind of far out, isn't it?"

"Maybe so," Shayne said grimly, "but it explains everything."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Find out if I'm right."

"Want some company?"

Shayne grinned. "I promised Darleen Page that she could have this story."

"You promised to call her first. You can still do that. But neither of you said anything about me tagging along for the finish."

"And you called *me* devious."

"Just doing my job, Mike, like you."

Shayne took a deep breath. "All right, if you're determined, here's the way we'll work it. . . ."

XI

THE FIRST STEP in Shayne's plan was a phone call. When

Jonathon Mallory answered, the detective identified himself and then said, "Do you think you could come down to the theater, Mr. Mallory? I think I've got this case figured out, and I'd like to talk it over with you."

"Wouldn't it be safer for you to come here to the hotel?"

"I think it'll be safe enough at the theater. I know who's trying to kill you now, so they can't take us by surprise."

Mallory sounded dubious, but he said, "Well . . . all right, if you're sure it's safe."

"I'll be there in an hour," Shayne said.

He broke the connection and put in a call to Bernard Darrow. One of the guards answered the phone, but Darrow took the instrument a moment later.

"What is it, Shayne?" he asked.

"I know who's trying to kill you," Shayne said simply.

"Well, spit it out, man! Who is it? We'll take it from there."

"I don't think so."

"What? Listen, Shayne, I like you, but don't play cute with me. I don't like that."

"I'm not being cute, Darrow, just sensible. If you want to know, you'll have to come to the Suncoast Playhouse in an hour."

"The Suncoast Playhouse?" Disbelief was evident in his voice.

"That's right," Shayne said, and hung up.

Rourke frowned at him from

across the desk. "Are you sure that was a good idea? You must have gotten him pretty mad."

"He'll be there," Shayne said. "And so will we."

Shayne had allowed an hour for Mallory and Darrow to get to the theater because he wanted plenty of time to get there before them. It wasn't long after noon when he stepped onto the deserted stage alone, his footsteps echoing hollowly in the empty auditorium. He had no trouble getting in. The lone guard in the place remembered him from the day before. Shayne had sent the guard across the street to a coffee shop, telling him that it was on orders of the theater management. He also knew that the guard hadn't believed him, but the bleak look on his face had convinced the man it would be the best thing to do.

The house lights were out, casting a pall over the whole place. A few lights backstage glowed through the wings, but Shayne felt like a very solitary figure as he stood on the stage, waiting.

He had left the rear door open, and he knew that the others would be coming from that direction. When he finally heard footsteps, he relaxed slightly. There might be some fast and furious action coming up, but that would beat the hell out of waiting.

Jonathon Mallory called out, "Mr. Shayne! What's going on? Tell me what you found out. Is

the man who was trying to kill me in jail?"

Shayne nodded a greeting to the director and said, "Not yet, but he will be before too long, I hope."

"But who is it?"

Shayne glanced at his watch. "I should be able to tell you in just a few minutes."

"But —" Mallory saw the look on Shayne's face and cut his question off. He stood there on the stage, miserable and nervous as he waited.

Then Shayne heard more footsteps, and three men came around a scenery flat and onto the edge of the stage. Darrow was in the center, flanked by two of his hard-faced soldiers.

Shayne heard Mallory gasp beside him. Darrow stopped short and snapped, "What is this, Shayne? Some kind of trick?"

Shayne shook his head. "No trick, Darrow." He stepped away from Mallory and let the angel and the director stare at each other. "Now that you're both here, why don't you go ahead and kill each other? Shayne went on. "You've been trying hard enough to do that for the last couple of days."

Mallory swallowed and said, "I — I don't know what you're talking about."

Shayne's tone became a little less harsh. "You don't have to keep up the pose anymore, Mallory. I know what's been going on, and I know what happened in a

little alley behind Broadway twenty years ago, too."

Darrow's face twisted in a snarl. "You're a damn fool, Shayne."

"You're right," Shayne said sharply. "I had two clients, each of whom was the target of a would-be killer, and I checked out everybody's alibis but yours. I never thought that maybe you were trying to kill each other. And the both of you never thought that the man you were trying to kill was also trying to kill you. You each thought it must be someone else who was after you."

Confusion and guilt and fear were mixed on Mallory's face. "I don't understand!" he cried. "There's no point in trying to conceal what I did anymore, but why would Darrow try to kill me?"

Darrow gestured sharply, and his two men each took a quick step away from him, their hands darting under their coats and coming out with leveled pistols. The former gangster bared his teeth in a savage grin and said, "Go on, Shayne. I'm not sure I understand all of it, either. Why was Mallory after me?"

Shayne's eyes were sweeping over the scene quickly, figuring all the angles. Darrow's men had the drop on him, there was no way around that. He couldn't even start to get his own gun out before they could drill him. His best chance for the moment was to keep talking.

"All right," Shayne said. "The way I've got it figured, it all goes back to what went on in that alley in New York. There were two murders there on the night of July 17, 1960. One was a gangland killing, the other an aborted mugging, or so the cops thought. They never connected the two, because there wasn't any real connection. You killed your partner Herman Solomon, Darrow, but the cops could never place you on the scene. You were real careful. But something happened that you hadn't counted on. As you were making your get-away you ran into a man further up the alley, a man who shouldn't have been there. That man was Mallory."

The director had dropped his head into his hands and began to sob quietly. Shayne shot him a glance that combined pity and contempt, then went on with his reconstruction.

"You saw Mallory's face, Darrow, and he saw yours. He could place you there at the scene of the murder. He ran back into the theater before you could get him and shut him up, though. You must have wondered later why he never came forward. He had a good reason. He was as afraid of what you saw as you were of what he saw."

"What are you trying to say, Shayne?" Darrow demanded.

"His wife's body must have been back in the shadows, and

you didn't see her. He had just strangled her. I know why you killed Solomon, Darrow, but I don't know why Mallory killed his wife. How about it, Mallory?"

The director was trembling all over now. He said in an anguished voice, "I didn't mean to. I slipped out of the theater during a scene I wasn't in to meet her. She said she was leaving me, that she was tired of me always being gone to rehearsals or classes. She just didn't understand! I was on the verge. I was about to get my big break. If she would have just stuck with me . . . ! But she wouldn't, and we argued, and I—I just lost my head . . . "

"You were too upset about what you had done to pay any attention to the papers for the next few days," Shayne said flatly. "And then you left New York and went back to your home. You probably never even heard about the other murder down the street. But you know someone had seen you there, just like Darrow knew someone had seen him. Nothing ever came of it, though, and over the years the memories faded for both of you. Until you came face to face with each other the night of the premiere. You recognized each other; neither one of you must have changed much in the last twenty years. All the old fears came back. Mallory, you took a shot at Darrow that first night. Where did you get the gun?"

Mallory took a deep, shuddery

breath. "It was a prop; it only had blanks with it, but I found some real ammunition in the little room that the guards use as a lounge."

"You nearly hit somebody else besides Darrow," Shayne said curtly.

"I didn't mean to! I was just scared, I lost my head . . . just like when I killed Helen . . . "

"You tried again last night, when you started to sneak into the grounds of Darrow's house, but you got scared off after you wounded that guard." Shayne swung toward Darrow. "I haven't forgotten about you, either, Darrow. You sent your men after Mallory twice yesterday. You didn't know he had a murder to hide, just like you."

Darrow waved a hand in the air and said arrogantly, "This weakling may admit to killing his wife, Shayne, but I'm not admitting anything. And you can't prove anything, not at this late date."

Mallory's head jerked up. "But you were there! You came running down that alley that night, almost like something was chasing you. I'll tell the police! I'll tell the police all of it, about what I did, too. I won't have to live with the guilt anymore . . . "

Darrow's face got even harder and colder. "All right, Shayne," he said slowly. "You put everything together, but it won't do you any good. You and Mallory both know I was there that night,

and you know what has to happen now." He gestured, and his two men stepped forward, bringing their guns up.

"Yeah," Shayne said, "I know. Tim!"

Spotlights snapped on, flooding the stage with blinding brilliance. Shayne left his feet in a dive, grabbing Mallory and knocking him off his feet, too. Darrow's men cursed and opened fire.

Shayne had squeezed his eyes tightly shut when he yelled Rourke's name, so that he hadn't been blinded when the reporter switched the lights on. Now Shayne rolled across the stage rapidly, jerking his gun out as he rolled, until the stage fell out from under him and he dropped lightly into the orchestra pit. He was out of the glare of the lights here, and he brought his gun up, aiming and firing in one efficient motion.

His first bullet shattered the elbow of one of Darrow's men. His second broke the collarbone of the other. Both of them flopped to the stage with sharp cries, out of the fight. Shayne yelled, "Shut 'em off, Tim!"

The lights clicked off. Shayne saw Darrow ducking back into the wings, a pistol in his hand. Mallory was sitting on the stage, looking dazed. Shayne headed for the stairs leading out of the pit and back up onto the stage.

Mallory shook his head and suddenly seemed to realize what was happening. He got to his feet,

saw Darrow running away, and cried out, "No!" He broke into a run. Both men disappeared behind the scenery flats and curtains.

Shayne reached the stage and took off after them, dodging around the clutter in the wings. He heard a shot, then a harsh cry, then the frenzied sounds of a struggle.

As he rounded a flat that represented a living room wall, he saw the struggling figures on the floor. Even in the dim light, he could see that Mallory was on top, his fingers locked around Darrow's throat, as they must have been around Helen Mallory's throat twenty years earlier. Shayne raced toward them, but even as he closed the gap, Darrow got his gun into position again and pulled the trigger. Mallory gasped, and Darrow flung him off. Shayne saw Mallory clutching at his stomach.

Darrow tried to leap to his feet and bring his gun around for another shot, but Shayne was already on him. Shayne lashed out with his gun, heard with satisfaction the thud it made as it cracked against Darrow's skull. The man slumped to the floor, his gun slipping from his fingers.

Shayne knelt beside Jonathon Mallory. He had been hit in the shoulder as well as the stomach, and he was breathing rapidly and raggedly. As Shayne checked the wounds grimly, the director

opened his eyes and choked out, "Couldn't let him get away . . . Killers have to pay . . . sooner or later . . . all of us . . . After all this time . . . almost glad it happened . . ."

Tim Rourke ran up behind Shayne and said, "I called the cops, Mike, just like we planned. You okay?"

"Yeah," Shayne said, standing up slowly. "You'd better go back to the phone and get an ambulance for Darrow and his men Mallory won't be needing one."

Rourke left in a hurry, but Shayne walked back out onto the stage slowly. He hadn't had any great affection for Mallory, but he hadn't disliked the man either. The last twenty years must have

been hell for him, Shayne knew, living with the fear of his crime being discovered, and living with the guilt of having committed it. Darrow, on the other hand, had probably never felt any remorse at all. But Darrow would live to go to prison for his crime.

Maybe that worked out better all around, Shayne thought. Maybe there weren't any good answers for Mallory, except the one he had found. Shayne had the feeling that there had been a play much more tragic here this afternoon than any that Malcolm Porter would ever write . . . and the cops would write the reviews of this one.

Mike Shayne went backstage to wait for them. ●

Mike Shayne returns next month in

THE VIPER CONSPIRACY

by Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

Who's Who in the Pulps

The old pulp magazines emphasized excitement, adventure, and mystery. See if you can unmask the secret identities listed in the left column by matching them with the real identities in the right column.

1. The Shadow	A. Jimmy Christopher
2. The Spider	B. Steve Thatcher
3. The Black Bat	C. Kip Burland
4. The Masked Rider	D. Cary Adair
5. The Masked Detective	E. Wayne Morgan
6. The Ghost	F. Richard Henry Benson
7. The Black Hood	G. Richard Wentworth
8. Captain Zero	H. Jim Anthony
9. Moon Man	I. Kent Allard
10. Captain Satan	J. Tony Quinn
11. The Super Detective	K. George Chance
12. Secret Operator #5	L. Lee Allyn
13. The Avenger	M. Rex Parker

ANSWERS

1-I 2-G 3-J 4-E 5-M 6-K 7-C 8-L 9-B 10-D 11-H 12-A

13-F

(Continued from page 5) MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

What — another English teacher? Nope, two of them.

HAL CHARLES is the pseudonym of two professors of English at a Kentucky College. Our colleagues would doubtless disown us if they knew we were more devoted to writing mysteries than worthwhile scholarly pieces like "Holistic Eschatology in the Later Works of Adelaide Crapsey." Members of the MWA, we have also written scripts, domestic fiction, and scholarly pieces on eschatology in the works of noted poetesses. Between the classroom and the hamburger joint where we write, we've been known to stop and hit a few tennis balls.

That sounds like a happy collaboration. Their stories read that way, too, and we have a couple more in inventory for the future pleasure of our noble readers.

By 1966, after ten years of writing, 40-year-old ROBERT EDMOND ALTER had sold 200 short stories and 17 book-length works, 14 of them children's books. The telegram accepting his last juvenile, "First Comes Courage," arrived on May 26. A month earlier, ALTER had written his friend and agent Larry Sternig:

I have received the final word. It is malignancy . . . well rooted in my pelvis and in order to get it out they have to remove my entire left hip and of course the left leg . . . They say I have a good fighting chance . . . I sent Tom the rough draft on "First Comes Courage" . . . I could use some . . . If I can live and write, then that is just what I shall do.

The day the telegram arrived, ALTER died in the hospital.

ALTER's published works are still kept alive by anthologists and foreign publishers. "Man with the Cigarette" in this issue is a never-before-published short short, recently discovered by his agent. It has a kind of classic pithy Somerset Maugham quality to it, and I hope you like it.

But enough of this. You've got a lot of good reading ahead of you. Go to it!

— CEF

The Turning Point

by HAL CHARLES

Two of his colleagues had already been murdered. Cruel necessity suggested to Professor Lyons that there might soon be a third!

THE SUDDEN SHATTERING of glass catapulted Professor Geoffrey Lyons out of the Thirteenth Century. His heart leaping to his throat, he dropped his fountain pen on the well-marked manuscript and spun toward the half-open window. The medieval cross of gray porcelain he had discovered some twenty years ago in that small shoppe outside Canterbury lay crumbled on the floor like a small ruin.

Trying to control his accelerated breathing, Lyons rose from behind his huge oaken desk and trekked slowly to the window. He met the onslaught of the howling November wind head-on and secured the room from further attack. Through the rain-splat-

tered panes, he could barely glimpse the deserted courtyard one floor below. All was dark save The Towers' entryway, which was illuminated by a naked yellow bulb.

Lyons turned back to the protection of his office. The walls of his keep were covered with Medieval artifacts he'd spent a lifetime collecting. But now, like the frayed string of the arbalest on the wall, his nerves were slowly unravelling. Lately he'd become too jumpy. The pressure, he finally had to admit, was almost more than he could handle.

Lyons abhorred having to work at night, but he had so little time remaining to finish the manuscript. "You got ten more days,"

his publisher had threatened him on the phone. "Remember, Lyons, we're doing you a favor. All we get from an egghead book like yours is a little prestige and even less profit."

The day had already been a total waste. The departmental secretary had shown him even less respect, demanding that his spring semester book list be turned in — immediately. Two coeds, who brazenly claimed in front of the whole class that he had cheated them out of points on the last test, had chased him back to his office with a steady barrage of complaints.

To top off his day, the Search Committee had grilled him as though he were a criminal, not a candidate for chairman of the department. They had narrowed their choice to two in-house candidates — him and his younger colleague, Rory Starke. Their bias was obvious. Unless his book were published this spring, they were going to come out for Starke's three-piece suits, his allegiance to anything trendy in education, and his willingness to accede to student whims. Their logic, expressed in a horribly mixed metaphor, was, "We must keep in mind that the lifeblood of our department is the student body."

Whatever happened to the values that had led him into education; those values that formed the

foundation of Medieval society? Had they died with the feudal system ("futile" systems his sophomores called it)? That's why, amidst the snickers of some colleagues, he had submitted his name for the chairmanship. Respect for authority and reverence for the intellect, the ideals of the traditional university, had to be brought back.

And if things on the inside weren't bad enough, there had been the police. Ever since the death one week ago of Bill Slade, a professor in the department; the burdensome investigation with its constant questions and untimely interruptions had made concentration on his oh-so-vital manuscript almost impossible.

Just this afternoon Attila (that was the nickname he had given the policeman in charge) had been particularly irritating. At about four thirty he had just begun reworking the chapter on the arbalest when his office door had been assaulted by those familiar battering-ram fists.

The door burst open, crashing against his ornate walnut bookcase.

"Don't mind the furniture, Lieutenant. If it endured the War of the Rôses, it can surely withstand a mere blow from a door."

"Writing again, Doc?" asked Lt. Bruin. "You know, it amazes me how much people pay for books. I saw on TV last week that some clown shelled out two mil for

a bible. I got nothing against the church, but, my lord, they give bibles away in motels."

"I assure you there's a great deal of difference between a Gutenberg Bible and a Gideon."

Bruin shrugged his hulking shoulders. "If you say so, Doc."

He closed the manuscript. "I thought I had answered all your questions."

"You mean you're so locked up in this museum you ain't heard the latest," said the policeman, pawing a pewter tankard.

"I have been working awfully hard."

"Bet this mug'll hold a ton of beer."

"You mentioned news?"

"Oh," said the Lieutenant, "another one of your teacher friends got skragged."

"Skragged?"

"Yeah, he got wasted, offed, snuffed, dusted — you know, killed. A Walter Forrest."

"Poor Walter," Lyons said, shaking his head. "He was such a gentle man. We shall not see his likes again."

"Well, anyway, I've spent the day talking to your department." Bruin began fingering a tarnished shield which held a place of prominence on the wall behind the desk. "You ever use this thing, Doc?"

"That 'thing,' Lieutenant, is a battle shield used by my ancestors at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415."

"That's impressive. Only place my ancestors ever fought was the Battle of the Bronx, 1928."

Bruin's gutteral laugh echoed throughout the chamber. "Listen, both Forrest and Slade taught in this department. There's got to be a connection."

"One was a specialist in Chinese history, the other in military history. One drank tea, the other coffee. Both were my good friends. Poor Walter even encouraged me to run for the chairmanship of the history department." Lyons paused. "Lieutenant, it's very difficult for me to talk about their deaths."

"It ain't exactly a Sunday picnic for me either, but it's got to be done."

"Cruel necessity," Lyons mused.

"Cruel what?"

"Necessity. Supposedly Oliver Cromwell, standing over the body of Charles the First, whom he had helped execute, indicated his mixed emotions in killing the king for the good of England with the words 'Cruel Necessity.'"

"Thanks for the ancient history lesson, but I'm interested in current affairs. Are you sure you don't know any connection in these two deaths?"

"I'm afraid I've made it a habit not to pry into my colleagues' affairs."

"You know, Doc, if two of my colleagues were found with a hole in their chests big enough to see

through, I'd change my habits." Lumbering across the room, Bruin stopped at the door and stared directly into his eyes. "I don't want to scare you, but I think I'd begin to wonder if maybe *I* was next."

The ringing phone startled Lyons. Who would know he was working late? Hesitantly he lifted the receiver.

"Lyons! . . . Who is this? . . . Mr. Phillips . . . I thought I made myself clear that our business was concluded . . . I will not see you and I wish you wouldn't call . . . No, I will not . . . You can not come here tonight! . . . Mr. Phillips? . . . Mr. Phillips?"

The line was dead.

Lyons walked back to the courtyard window. The rain had stopped. Overhead the clouds had broken, and the November moon now hurled its sleek shafts into the courtyard below. A single star sat on the moon's nether tip. A star-dogged moon, the Medieval ballads called it, a sign of certain evil to come.

Despite a sudden spasm in the pit of his stomach, he withdrew to his desk. He had to finish the manuscript. Publish, or perish the thought of the chairmanship and his ideal. Mechanically he crossed out a word here and added a phrase there.

Phillips had been a thorn in his side since he had chaired the doctoral candidate's three-man dissertation committee. After

having read the first draft of the dissertation, Walter had commented that if Phillips could learn to view history from a less emotional perspective, he would have a great future.

The fountain pen slid from Lyons' sweating fingers as he recalled his last meeting with Phillips. Unable to accept that his dissertation had been rejected, the student had exploded. He had violently hurtled the dissertation, striking Lyons in the sternum, then had stormed from his office threatening, "You haven't heard the last of this!"

Bruin's connection. Slade and Forrest had served on Phillips' doctoral committee.

Below Lyons a door slammed. Staccato footsteps resounded through The Towers' empty hallways, and then stopped outside his office. Lyons felt pinioned to his chair as the door swung open.

Phillips' tall, thin figure stood on the threshold, his dark eyes glaring.

Lyons cleared his throat. "Mr. . . Phillips."

"I've been trying to contact you for over a month."

"I'm sorry. Your dissertation was rejected. It's out of my hands. The matter is closed." Lyons swung his gaze to the manuscript before him.

"Damn it!" Phillips yelled, slamming his fist against the coat closet door. "I didn't fly all the way back to the University just to

hear the same old refusal."

"Regretably," Lyons said, gripping the edge of his desk, "your dissertation is . . . irretreivable."

"You don't understand. That dissertation is my life."

"I'm . . ."

"The Committee thought the idea was such a great one in the beginning."

"It's like I told you then. Some of your conclusions were insupportable."

"Bull!"

Lyons rose beneath his shield. "How can a man who purports to be an expert on *Médiéval* warfare claim that the long bow was the dominant weapon of the Middle Ages?"

Phillips advanced. "Come on, Professor. Other recent theories have suggested that the Battle of Crecy in 1346 was the turning point. The long bow with its greater range and mobility made the crossbow obsolete." Phillips' hand sliced through the air like an executioner's ax. "Dinosaurs like you and your committee are long overdue for extinction!"

"Young man, I won't be threatened like this."

Phillips stepped closer. Only the oaken desk separated the two antagonists. Instinctively Lyons pulled the shield from its supports and held it in front of him.

"I talked to Slade and Forrest and made them understand exactly how I felt," Phillips said, the edge of his voice cutting

Lyons. "If you won't listen to me, there are — as they said in the Dark Ages — ways to gain satisfaction."

Phillips stomped out the door, slamming it behind him. The seige over, Lyons rehung the shield with trembling hands.

He knew Phillips would be back.

The closed manuscript stared up at him. The original title had to go. His publisher would like the new one he had just chosen — *The Turning Point*.

Boldly he crossed out Phillips' lengthy *From Hastings to Agincourt: A History of Medieval Warfare*.

He pushed the manuscript aside. A more pressing matter demanded his attention.

Removing the arbalest and quiver from the wall, he marched to the window. His muscles strained as he slipped the crank into the turning point and wound.

It would be easier with Phillips than it had been with his old friends Forrest and Slade, but all three stood in the way of the chairmanship and the return to the ideals of the medieval university.

It was indeed, as Cromwell had realized, a *cruel necessity*.

Placing the crossbow against his shoulder and inserting the steel-tipped bolt, Lyons watched Phillips step into the courtyard.

"No, Mr. Phillips," he whispered. "Not much range, not very mobile, but hardly obsolete."

Girl In The Dark

by CHESTER H. CARLFI

The intruder held Janice in a firm grip. "I'm the one who killed those six nurses," he told her. "Of course, I had some fun with them first . . ."

HER PARENTS DIDN'T LIKE Janice to go alone into the back-yard, particularly at night. Here at the outskirts of the city there were too many dangers, they thought, for a sixteen-year-old girl. Snakes came out at night, and sometimes a hungry wolf ventured in from the hills to find food.

But Janice was unafraid. Surely a girl her age could decide these things for herself. It wasn't as though she were completely helpless. Still, she loved her parents and would not openly oppose them. But they'd driven into town to see a movie, leaving her home alone to listen to her records and the radio, and she'd

gotten restless and went out the back door, down the steps onto the soft grass.

The night was cool, with just a hint of possible rain in the air. She felt a kinship with the night, and she loved being out in it, alone with her thoughts, relaxing in the darkness.

She walked down the worn path, past the abandoned well, around the crumbling gazebo to the tree, where she felt through the darkness until she found a big apple. She shivered then as a sudden gust of wind chilled her. It always seemed chillier down here this far away from the warm house.

She moved quickly back up the path and into the comfort of the house, where she turned on the radio.

" . . . still looking for escaped sex murderer, George Decker," the announcer said. "Decker is believed to be in the vicinity and every one is urged to stay inside, behind locked doors, until this dangerous criminal is apprehended . . . "

Janice switched to a music station, but not before a shudder ran through her. She never paid much attention to the news, but she'd heard about George Decker. A man in his mid-thirties, Decker had been a maintenance man in a hospital, where one night he'd raped and brutally murdered six nurses.

Raped. The word had an unpleasant edge to it. Janice wondered what it would be like to be raped. Certainly not very pleasant, she was sure of that. And the things the man had done after that, with the surgical knives! Her body convulsed again at the memory.

The she shoved the thoughts from her mind and nibbled at the apple and swayed in time to the music. She loved to dance, but she seldom got the chance except when she was by herself. She never did it when her parents were around because she was afraid they'd laugh at her. And no boys ever asked her out to dance. It wasn't because she

wasn't pretty enough; even the older married men in the neighborhood were attracted to her.

"We interrupt this program," an announcer cut into the music, "to bring you a special news bulletin. The escaped sex murderer, George Decker — "

With a sigh, Janice turned off the radio. She wanted music, not news. She put a stack of records on the hi-fi, danced around the living room for awhile, then just sat on the couch, munching her apple and listening to the music.

It must have been a hour later when the knocking sounded on the front door.

She didn't hear it above the music at first, but the knocking persisted, and finally she turned off the record player and went to answer it.

"Who's there?" she asked through the closed door.

"My car broke down," a man's voice came. "My wife's ill and needs a doctor. Can I use your phone?"

Janice hesitated. Her parents had told her not to open the door to strangers, which she considered good advice. Now, with a sex murderer roaming the countryside . . .

"We don't have a phone," Janice lied. She remembered the man could probably see the telephone wires coming into the house from the pole by the road, so she said, "I mean, we've got a phone, but it's not working."

Another dumb thing to say, she reprimanded herself. If the man outside the door were the murderer, she'd just about told him she couldn't call for help.

"Let me in," the man said, "just for a minute."

"Wait there," Janice called. "I'll get my father."

She hoped that would scare the man away, but she didn't count on it. She went to the phone, picked it up, paused at a sudden, terrifying thought.

Did I lock the back door?

She tried to remember. She was outside, soaking up the cool night, and then it got too chilly and she came up the steps and into the kitchen —

"Oh no!"

She slammed down the phone and raced across the living room and into the kitchen. She reached the door just as it opened and a hard body rammed into her.

"No phone, huh?" a harsh male voice grated in her ear. The man laughed. His big hands held her close and tight. "You don't lie very good, girlie."

She caught her breath. "My father —"

"I looked in the windows before I knocked," the man said, "and I didn't see anybody else. You're all alone here, ain't you?"

A lie leaped to her lips, but she bit it back. "My parents will be back in a few minutes."

"Will they now? That doesn't give us much time, does it?"

She whimpered as he twisted her arm.

"Not much time to get acquainted," he went on, "but enough."

His face pressed close. She smelled his harsh, bitter breath, felt his stubble of beard against her face. She tried to turn away, but his lips covered her mouth in a savage kiss.

She managed to twist her head and open her mouth to scream, but his fist shot up quickly and hammered her face. She staggered back, reaching out for the wall to steady herself. Stunned, her head spinning, she palmed her hurting cheek.

"Do you know who I am, girlie?" he asked her.

"No," she lied.

"My name is George Decker." He said the words proudly. "I'm the one the police are after."

"Oh," was all Janice could say.

She tried to be calm, but the frantic pounding of her heart wouldn't let her. She wondered what time it was and if her parents would really be coming home from the movie soon. She wondered what he was planning to do to her. She wondered if she could rush past the man and escape.

"I'm the one who killed those nurses," he said. "Six of them. They deserved to die, the damn sluts." He chuckled at the memory. "Of course I had some fun with them first."

"What do you want?" Janice

asked, her voice hoarse with fright.

"I need a place to hide out for a few hours, girlie," he said, "and this seems like as good a place as any." His hand moved along her arm. "In fact, maybe better than most. Oh, oh, what's that?"

Janice heard the sound, too — a car pulling into the driveway. She caught her breath as she recognized it.

The man cursed. "It's the sheriff's car." He grabbed Janice roughly by the arm and pushed her to the door. "Get rid of him — fast," he ordered in a low voice, "or else — "

He didn't finish the threat, but he didn't have to. Janice felt a sharp knifeblade menacing her neck.

A man's boots pounded up the wooden porch. The doorbell rang.

Somehow, Janice found her voice. "Who — who's there?"

"Janice?" A familiar male voice.

"Jeff? Is that you, Jeff?"

Jeff Mercer was a young deputy who stopped by occasionally to talk to her parents. At least that's the reason he gave, but Janice got the impression that he really wanted to be with her. But he was too shy to ask her out, and she suspected he was afraid her parents would be suspicious of his motives and not let him come around any more.

"Are you all right, Janice?" he asked through the closed door.

The man's grip on her arm tightened; the knifeblade edged against her throat.

"I — I'm fine, Jeff."

"I didn't see your folks' car."

"They went into town to a movie. They should be home pretty soon. I'd let you in, but — "

"No, that's okay. Don't open your door to anybody tonight. You heard about the man who escaped?"

"Yes."

"George Decker's a dangerous man, Janice. Keep your doors locked until your folks get home. Understand."

"I understand, Jeff."

"I'll drop by later," he said.

"That'll be fine, Jeff. I'd like that."

Even with Decker's cold grip on her arm, his breath burning her ear, the sharp knife at her throat, Janice felt secure with Jeff just on the other side of the closed door. But now that his boots were scraping away, she felt the beginnings of panic. Should she scream and warn him someone was with her?

Decker seemed to sense her indecision. He quickly stuck the knife in his belt and used that hand to cover her mouth, at the same time pulling her away from the door. A moment later the sound of a car revving into life came from outside, followed by its fading acceleration out of the driveway and up the road.

The man chuckled. "Now comes

the fun part, girlie."

He pulled her up tight to him kissing her mouth while his eager hands roamed her squirming young body.

Janice pulled her mouth free. "Don't — please. I'm a — " She hesitated, ashamed to say the word to him.

"A virgin? Well, you won't be for long, girlie."

For an instant his grip loosened, and during that moment Janice brought her knee solidly into the man's unsuspecting crotch. He yelled and danced away, groaning. Janice took a deep breath. She *had* to run now, or he'd surely kill her. She rushed past him, through the living room door into the kitchen. Her hands twisted the knob, she flung the door wide and dashed through it onto the back porch, then down to the dirt path snaking across the back yard.

He was right behind her, cursing, muttering threats. She knew the pathway better than anyone, especially in the utter dark, but she knew he'd catch up with her.

Unless —

Even in darkness she knew where it was. She could sense it — the slight, almost unnoticeable twist in the path, with the gazebo up ahead and then the apple tree. She turned, flung herself sideways, and fell roughly onto the rough ground, whimpering.

He stopped running. His heavy breathing came to her across the chill night air. His feet whispered and crackled on the grass and dry twigs.

"Don't hurt me," she pleaded. "Please don't hurt me."

He eased closer, taking his time, knowing she couldn't escape him now. His foot scraped board, but he took no notice, his attention fully on the helpless girl. His other foot came up, and his full weight settled on the plank-covered well opening between him and the girl.

And the planks, rotted and moss-covered, crashed inward, taking the man with them. His bewildered, terrified screams followed him down the narrow well to the bottom. There was a thud and a splash and silence.

Janice lay there on the cold ground for a moment; regaining her breath. Then she inched her way through the darkness until she felt the needle-sharp splinters around the edges of the well.

A faint voice echoed from the deep hole. "Help me. Please. I — I'm bleeding . . ."

There was more — desperate cries from a man in the reddening water at the bottom of the abandoned well — but Janice didn't want to hear any more. She crawled around the opening, got to her feet, and made her way back up to the house, brushing grass and twigs from her clothing.

In the living room she found the

phone, picked it up, thinking. *If I don't tell anyone he'll die in there, bleed to death.* Then she thought of what he had wanted to do to her, and she replaced the phone.

SHE WAS LISTENING to the radio when her parents arrived, accompanied by Jeff Mercer.

"Thank goodness you're all right, Janice," her mother gushed. "We were worried about you."

"I wanted to tell you," Jeff said, "that we got that man, that escaped murderer, George Decker."

"Thank the Lord for that," Janice's father said.

"A farmer discovered him holed up in his barn about ten miles from here and locked him in until the police arrived." Jeff sighed. "But we've got another mystery on our hands. Why isn't Fred Morris watching television tonight?"

"You mean Fred Morris our neighbor just up the road?" Janice's mother said. "I don't see anything mysterious about that."

"Me neither," Jeff admitted, "but his wife gave me a call, said Fred never, but *never*, misses his Thursday night television, so of course she's sure he's met with foul play. You didn't happen to see him around by any chance?"

Janice's parents said they didn't.

"Well, he's probably out getting a beer. You know how Fred likes to drink."

And try to feel up young girls, Janice thought, clenching her fists angrily. Whenever the man was around her, he made her skin crawl. He always seemed to come closer to her than need be, and his hands would stray "accidentally" against her body.

He hadn't fooled her with that story about being the escaped sex murderer George Decker. She recognized his voice, even though he disguised it. He'd just wanted to rape her and have the blame fall on someone else!

"Well, goodnight, folks," Jeff Mercer said. "Goodnight, Janice."

"I'd like to walk you out to the car, Jeff, if you don't mind."

"Mind? I'd like that."

Janice linked her arm in his and they walked down the front porch steps and out to the Sheriff's car in the driveway.

"They make a nice couple, don't they?" her father said.

His wife nodded. "We shouldn't have left her alone."

"I suppose you're right," he agreed. He gazed fondly at the two people standing in the driveway and smiled. "But I have the feeling that in a couple of years our daughter will have her own protector. Janice is a self-sufficient young lady, but a blind girl can be quite helpless."

In The Cards

by ALAN J. WARREN

It was a pleasant, friendly game — until the stakes got unbearably high!

THE GAME HAD BEEN GOING for about an hour. We'd been playing for table stakes, Harvey and I, and it had only begun to get exciting when I'd passed the eighty dollar point. Not that

eighty dollars was that much, but something about the way I'd acquired it was exciting: It was money I had no right to, money I had done nothing to earn. It was as wickedly welcome as swag

from a bank robbery, and tax-free. I wanted more of it, much more.

"Let's stop a while," said Harvey. "I'm getting wiped out."

"It's only eighty bucks," I said. "Come on. You're not exactly underpaid. And you're the one who suggested we play for money in the first place."

"Yeah, but —"

"Come on. A few more hands. Just a few."

So we played. Harvey had left off sipping his beer, I noticed, but it didn't improve his game. I won the next two hands, he won the one after that, and then I began a winning streak. For a time, I was invincible. It finally ended when Harvey came out ahead, but by that time he was in debt to me for \$220 — still not a lot for either of us, but enough to have deepened a few of the lines in his forehead and to have temporarily killed his taste for beer.

Harvey pushed the deck of cards aside. "Let's hold off for awhile," he said.

"Anything you say," I grinned and lit a cigarette, regarding Harvey with a cool glare of tolerance and a kind of amused contempt. He was wearing the same ridiculous sunglasses he always wore, inside and out, a loud summer shirt, and knee pants, the kind that showed off his abominably hairy legs to worst advantage.

Just at that point I heard the car in the driveway. Barbara came in a moment later, a grocery bag in her arms.

"Hello, Harvey," she said, edging past him, bussing me on the cheek, and lowering the package onto the tabletop, Harvey murmured greetings, and he and I sat regarding each other across the kitchen table while she put the groceries away. When she was done she came over to me, kissed me again, and said, "I'm a little tired, Richard. You mind if I pop up to bed for a while?"

"Go ahead," I said to her. Then to Harvey: "How about a game of blackjack?"

Barbara regarded both of us a moment longer, then said, "One of these days I'll understand what grown men see in a pack of cards," and walked out of the room and up the stairs.

"How about some game other than blackjack?" Harvey finally asked.

"Sure," I said. "What do you want? Poker? Whist? Crazy Eights? Gin rummy? Piyute? You name it."

He paused to consider, then, hitting on a new notion, said: "How about if I try to pick the cards out of the deck? You know, the old ESP bit."

I suppressed a smile. I knew the old ESP bit. Just in the past few months Harvey had started claiming he had ESP. He said he'd known about people's

deaths before they'd happened, had picked out racing results and Academy Award winners, that sort of thing. I had tried him and he'd been right — once out of every ten or twenty tries. And every time he guessed right, he'd say, "You see? I knew it, I felt it." I never bothered to ask him what he'd felt the nine or nineteen times he'd guessed wrong.

So I said, casually: "You mean you'll pick out certain cards in the deck?"

"Sure," he said.

I reached for the cards and began shuffling them. "How about if I hold up three cards?" I said. "You tell me what they are."

"Now you're talking," Harvey said. "Hey, hey."

"Ho, ho," I said, shuffling the cards.

It was our little joke, a ritualistic thing with no more to it than the casual "What's happening?" or "How's it going?" one chum greets another with; yet it sounded, to those who heard us, like a private joke.

Jimmy came in. He'd been playing outside with Sean, our younger son, and his face and hands were dirty.

"Better go wash up," I said.

"OK," he said. On his way out the door he said, "Are we gonna eat soon?"

"Not for a while yet," I said, finishing the shuffle. "Daddy has

to make some money first. Hey, hey." The last to Harvey.

"Ho, ho," he said, watching Jimmy go.

I spread the cards out on the table and said, "How about if I spot you a little? You know — four to one odds, something like that? After all, you're the one taking chances."

"Not with my ESP," he said, smiling.

I smiled too, and went to the refrigerator for another can of beer. "So," I said, "what do you want to play for?"

He paused, and I could see by his expression that he was willing to gamble, willing to take greater risks than he had up till now. The preceding games had stimulated him, rubbed his confidence raw, stirred him to the point where he would be willing to take ridiculous risks. There are people like that at every table in Vegas. I used to be one of them.

Without a change in his expression, Harvey said very quietly, "How about my Corvette?"

I had raised the can of beer to my lips, and just as I was about to sip it I paused. I couldn't believe what I'd just heard. Harvey had never been a prudent man, but to bet your car, to put a beautiful, soaring, horrendously-expensive thing like a late-model Corvette on the line on the off-chance that you might, just conceivably *might*, guess the right card was —

I said: "Are you serious?"

He thought about it a moment, then nodded. "Yeah, I'm serious." He paused, then added: "Of course, I expect you to put up something of greater value. You said four to one odds."

Something in my stomach turned and tightened. "You mean the station wagon —"

Harvey shook his head. "That's hardly equitable," he said. "A station wagon for a 'Vette? And we're talking about four to one odds. No, it'd have to be something a lot more valuable than your car."

"What do you suggest?" I said, speaking with deliberate casualness.

"I don't know," he said. "What's the most valuable thing you own?"

I puffed on my cigarette and glanced around the kitchen. Nothing there suggested the kind of spectacular worth we were talking about. Finally, I said, "I don't know." Then I grinned. "How about Jimmy?"

Harvey grinned back. "Now you're talking. A human pelt is always worth more than material goods. But Jimmy doesn't interest me. If we were talking about Barbara, though —" His grin widened considerably.

I smiled. "I'd be perfectly willing to put Barbara up in exchange for your car," I said, "but I don't think she'd like the idea very much." I could have

added that Barbara didn't particularly like Harvey, didn't enjoy his visits, didn't appreciate his occasional lecherous remarks, and certainly wouldn't consider being his for all the Corvettes in the world. But I didn't.

"I'm sure she wouldn't," said Harvey. "But you could give her to me, for one night, without her knowledge."

"And how would I go about doing that?" I asked.

You must realize we were only talking, chatting, discussing ridiculous, impossible notions, the way two people might sit around discussing ways to commit the perfect murder without the slightest intention of actually going out and committing one. Still, there had been a hard edge of seriousness in Harvey's voice when he'd offered the Corvette.

He leaned forward now in the tiny chair and said, very seriously, "I guess you'd have to let me sneak in at night, while she was asleep, and let me into your bedroom. You'd leave, and I'd, you know, sort of take over for you."

I laughed. "That's absurd."

"Yeah, I guess so," he said, but went on. "Of course, it would have to be done very carefully. You'd have to tell me what your usual routine is, and I'd have to follow it. But if it were dark enough, and she were half-asleep, she'd never know it wasn't you."

I took a last puff from my cigar-

ette. "She'd know."

Harvey grinned. "Not if she were drugged."

I had stubbed my cigarette out and was on the verge of lighting another when I stopped. "Are you really serious?"

"Sure," Harvey said. He smiled. "You drop a sleeping pill in her drink, wait till she's sound asleep, then go downstairs and wait till I'm finished. And —"

"Outside of the improvement, she'll never know the difference," I said, borrowing a line from Groucho Marx. I lit another cigarette, then turned back to Harvey. He was no longer smiling; he looked like he was in deadly earnest about the whole thing. So I said, "You're really serious? You'll put up your Corvette if you don't guess the cards I hold up?"

He paused to consider the terms of the bet, as if testing the depth of the water before jumping in. "Yes, If you'll put up one — just one — evening with Barbara if you lose. Those are the terms."

I stopped to consider it a moment. It was ridiculous, certainly, but the terms of the bet were very clear. All that had to be done to put Harvey's shining white Corvette in my driveway was to hold up five sets of three cards — that was the usual arrangement — that Harvey could never in a million years identify, no more and no less. And in that moment of decision, I could see Harvey's Corvette in my mind's eye with

startling clarity, and I knew I wanted it as badly as I'd ever wanted anything in my life, and I absolutely *had* to have it. I was not worried about Harvey winning — I knew in every single fibre of my being that he could never win, not by ESP and not by guessing. The law of averages quite simply did not give him a ghost of a chance.

"All right," I said finally. I noticed that my voice was wavering, and I cleared my throat. "If you're crazy enough to put up your Corvette if you lose, I'm crazy enough to put up Barbara for one night, if I do."

Harvey grinned. "I'm crazy enough."

We shook on it.

I gathered the cards and began shuffling them. Might as well do it quickly, I thought, before he has a chance to reconsider. I reviewed the terms of the bet. "You'll try to pick out three cards like before, right? You'll pick out the number and the suit, with five different chances with five different sets of three. Right?"

"Right," he said. He didn't look worried.

"OK," I said.

I looked down at my cigarette which by now had grown an ash fully two inches long without my noticing it, and stubbed it out, then returned my attention to the cards. I re-shuffled them, picked out three cards at random, and held them up, sitting well back

from Harvey and taking special care so that he could not see their faces.

"What are they?"

"The jack of clubs, the three of hearts, the ace of diamonds," he said confidently.

I turned the cards over. He looked down upon the queen of hearts, the six of spades, and the ten of clubs.

He looked slightly pale. "I get four more chances," he said.

"That you do," I said, and began re-shuffling the cards. At that moment I felt suddenly, wonderfully, victorious, as if there was nothing I couldn't do. Before, I'd wanted only to win Harvey's car, but now something else had been added to my desire: I wanted to beat Harvey, to trounce him, to — if at all possible — destroy him, and by so doing make up for all the losses I'd suffered in all the years I'd spent gambling. This would make up for all the small losses, and, in some ways, for most of the big ones, too. I could already see myself behind the wheel of Harvey's Corvette, coming down the street and pulling into our driveway while Harvey next door, a rake in his hands, looked up from a pile of leaves with a sour expression.

I held up another three cards. "Go ahead," I said.

He paused to consider them. A tiny vein stood out on his forehead, and I knew he was concentrating, trying to sum up all

of his ESP powers, attempting to find within his own mind a number and a suit. And I knew that at that moment his mind was an absolute blank.

When he finally spoke, he said, "The ace of — no, wait, the *ten* of clubs, the four of hearts, and the . . . the queen of spades."

"You sure?" I asked politely.

He smiled. "I'm sure."

I laid the cards down face up. The four of diamonds, the ten of hearts, and the jack of diamonds.

I swept the cards up and began shuffling them again. "Want another beer?" I said, my voice calm and even.

"No," he said. His voice betrayed his emotion. He was nervous, and he had begun to sweat.

I continued shuffling, doing a thorough job, and taking extra-long at it, to stretch out Harvey's suffering. By now I realized that I wanted to make him suffer, probably for daring to suggest such an absurd and hurtful thing. And I knew he would never have dared to suggest it if we hadn't discussed Barbara in the past, the way men do, in sometimes indelicate ways, and I wanted to make him suffer for that, too.

Three more cards. The four of hearts, the six of spades, the ten of clubs. Harvey guessed the queen of diamonds, the ten of spades, and the ten of clubs.

I smiled. So did Harvey. He'd gotten one right, but only one. I

had a feeling it was as close as he was going to get.

Harvey's smile had vanished even before I'd finished shuffling the cards for his fourth try. By now, the vein in his forehad was standing out very clearly, and his normally ruddy complexion had turned sallow.

"Read them off," I said, and waited. Harvey concentrated very hard, harder than before, and it was a very long time before he spoke. When he did, it was through sheer agony of effort.

"The ten of diamonds, the three — no, the *four* of clubs, and the, um, the . . . king of spades," he said.

I didn't say anything. I looked down at the cards in my hands. I noticed that my fingers had commenced to tremble.

Harvey's agony of concentration over, he grinned and said, "Well? I'm sure I was right that time."

I didn't say a word. I could feel my bowels constricting, and for a moment I thought I might actually black out. I felt the way I always did when I lost a bet.

"Well?" Harvey said. "What are they?"

I still did not say anything. Eventually, I got up from the table and walked away to the liquor cabinet and got out a bottle of brandy and a glass and poured out a very stiff drink and drank from it and finally turned around to face Harvey.

By now Harvey had walked

around the table, turned the cards over, and was looking down at them and speaking in excited tones, nearly shouting.

"I knew it! Dammit, I knew it that time! I could feel it all along!"

He looked up at me, saw my expression, and grinned. "Hey, hey," he said.

My mouth felt very dry, and I found it difficult to speak. "You're not going to —"

Harvey stood up. "I damn well am," he said. I realized for the first time how big he was, and how strong, and — I could imagine — how virile.

Again, I found it very difficult to speak. "You can't," I finally said. "It isn't fair. I had no right to agree."

Harvey grinned again. "But you *did* agree," he said. "And you knew the terms of the bet. If *I*'d lost, I'd've had to fork over my Vette. And you would've taken it. But I *didn't* lose."

He grinned again, and for just a moment I thought I was going to put down my brandy and walk over to him and smash his god-damned face in, right where the grin was. I think he was aware of it, too, for he stopped grinning at once, and when he spoke, it was in an entirely different tone of voice..

"Look," he said, "a bet's a bet. I was the one taking a chance. I had a lot of confidence in myself, but I could have lost — at one point I thought I was going to. I

thought my powers had deserted me. I really did. And then I would have been out one 'Vette. And don't think I don't love that car. I wouldn't have liked parting with it one bit."

I didn't say anything. I finished my brandy and continued to speculate on the terms of the bet and how unlikely the chances had seemed of Harvey guessing the right three cards, and how close I had come to getting his Corvette. The worst part of it all was that I'd felt like that so often in the past, and every time I'd felt that, I'd sworn to myself, this is it, this is the last time I will ever gamble in my entire life. This is no way to live.. And every time, a few months or weeks after I'd sworn off, I'd gone back to it.

And then I could hear Harvey talking, telling me that he'd supply the sleeping pill, and that all I had to do was make certain Barbara was sound asleep, and then sneak downstairs and out to the back door, where Harvey would be waiting, and let him in, and then wait — for 20 minutes, he said; that was all he'd need. Then I could come back in, and go upstairs, and he would have to leave, have to go even if nothing had happened, although I knew goddamned well that in that length of time something would most certainly have happened. And that was all there was to it.

I listened to all of this more or less in silence, riddling my

head occasionally, murmuring "mmm" every once in awhile, and agreeing to everything, the way I always agreed to pay off a bet. He talked me into setting the date for the next evening, Friday night. Harvey said he'd get the sleeping pills to me in the afternoon, and from there we worked out the times and the specifics of everything. I remember telling him he'd have to be very quiet so as not to wake Jimmy or Sean, and I remember helping myself to another stiff drink, and then another. By the time Harvey left, we'd taken care of every detail, and I was so bombed I could hardly make it to the front room, where I immediately fell into a deep sleep on the couch.

HARVEY CAME BY with the sleeping pills the next afternoon. In the evening Barbara and I had a quiet dinner, and when the phone rang in the middle of it, and she got up to answer it, I dropped the pills into her wine. She returned to tell me Harvey was on the line.

"Everything going OK?" said Harvey. "Did you give her the pills?"

"Yes, just now." I hesitated. "Harvey, can't we — "

"Listen, I'll be outside your back door at twelve. She'll be dead to the world by then. Everything'll work out."

"Yes," I said, dully. "Everything will work out."

I hung the phone up, retraced my steps back into the kitchen and waited nervously till dinner was over. The pills worked with marvelous efficiency: Barbara was asleep within half an hour. I went upstairs, ordered Jimmy and Sean into bed, then tiptoed into our room and sank into a chair near the foot of the bed. I watched the rise and fall of her chest and listened to the steady sound of her breathing. After an hour or so, I tiptoed out of the room, went downstairs, and waited in the kitchen with a glass of scotch. By the time twelve o'clock came I had drunk more than a glass and less than a bottle. I went very quietly to the back door.

Harvey was there, waiting. He was not wearing his sunglasses now, and there was a wild, fantastic gleam in his eyes that should have told me more than it did.

"Be back in twenty," he whispered, and brushed past me.

I let him go: I walked out the door and stood in our back yard, looking up at the sky, at the moon and the stars, and lit a cigarette and smoked it and said nothing. When it was done, I lit another.

By the time I had smoked three of them I glanced down at my watch and turned to go back in. And at exactly that moment there was a sound from within, and Harvey emerged from the house. There was a look on his face that did not exactly bespeak satis-

faction or pride or gloating, but suggested all of these and more.

"All done, sport," he whispered.

I dropped the last cigarette on the ground and stepped on it. "Fine," I said evenly. "Now you can go home, and you can stay there. I don't want to see you in this house again, and I don't want to speak to you ever again. Get it?"

He didn't say anything. I didn't look at him. I walked past him and up into the house and closed the back door and locked it.

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH time went past. It might have been a month; it might have been a little more. Minor irritations tended to upset me, and whenever I looked into Barbara's eyes, I wondered if she knew. It was fully two weeks after that Friday night that I remembered Harvey's tell-tale shaving lotion. Had that given the whole show away? Did Barbara know, had she known all along, and was she testing me even now? Several times she asked me why I was staring at her so strangely, and I made up any number of excuses. But always, whenever I looked straight into her eyes, I knew that someday — perhaps soon or perhaps after Harvey eventually moved away — I would have to tell her.

I was also rough in my handling of the kids, and one day, after I'd given Jimmy a particularly rough

chewing-out for something or other, I went up to his room to apologize to him. Through the door, I could hear him playing, and when I pushed it open I saw him sitting on the far side of the room, firing a toy gun of science-fiction design at Sean. He was wearing a pair of dark glasses.

Both boys stopped what they were doing the moment I entered. I said, "Jimmy, I'd like to —" and then stopped.

He regarded me quizzically through the dark glasses.

"What are those?" I asked.

"These?" he said. He took them off. "See-through glasses. You can see magic writing."

"Could I see them?" I said. He handed them to me. I put them on, and looked out at the world through a purple haze. "What kind of magic writing?" I asked.

"This kind," he said.

He handed me a notebook. I looked through it. Page after page was filled with Jimmy's scrawled handwriting and primitive drawings of horses, a subject of some fascination to him. But when I took the glasses off and looked at the notebook, each page was apparently blank.

"Daddy, where're you going?" Jimmy called after me.

"I'll be right back," I said. I was already halfway down the stairs.

Barbara was in the kitchen, fixing dinner. I began pulling the drawer of the cabinet beside the

kitchen table out. "Where are the cards we keep in the kitchen?" I asked.

"They should be . . . in the drawer," Barbara said. She seemed alarmed by my manner and actions.

I found them. I slipped on the dark glasses and looked first at one card, then at another, and then another. Written on the back of every one was the suit and number of that particular card, printed very largely and clearly in a familiar hand. I put the cards very carefully away, closed the drawer of the cabinet, took off the glasses, and went back upstairs.

Jimmy was waiting for me. "Could I have my glasses back?" he said.

"Here they are. Could I borrow your bat for a little while?"

"My hardball bat?"

"Yes. Your hardball bat."

He went to get it. Handing it to me, he said, "We gonna play baseball?"

"Not today, I said. Holding the bat firmly by the handle, I hurried downstairs and out the front door.

The back door of Harvey's house was open. As was our usual custom, I entered without knocking. At first he seemed surprised, but then his features relaxed, and his lips pulled back in a kind of mocking grin. "Hey, hey," he said..

"Ho ho," I said, raising the bat.

A Company Man

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

The boy lay sprawled on his back on the muddy bank, his legs dangling in the water. His eyes were half-open, staring dully at the gray sky, and a gash on his forehead oozed a thick stream of blood!

MARK COLLIER ARRIVED at the private golf course with the gut-tightening knowledge that his behavior this morning would determine the direction of his future with Universal Products, Inc. In a matter of minutes, Howard Jenson, the president of the corporation, would appear, and their golf match would begin. A simple nine holes of golf that would decide whether or not Mark would be the next vice-president of the corporation or would remain a high-level under-

ling.

Was he expected to win or lose the match? Mark wondered. Did Jenson want to be treated as a casual golf partner or as Mark's superior? Should he be loud and jovial like Jenson or quiet and subdued like Charlie Lambert, the past vice-president, had been? This was his final chance to sway Jenson in his favor, and he had to present the right impression.

"You can determine a man's character far more clearly on the golf course than in an office,"

Jenson had said in his gravelly voice. "That's why I'm inviting you, Mark, and each of the other two candidates to play a round of golf with me at my country club on three consecutive mornings.

All three of you men have excellent credentials and fine work performance records. I know that you're all weekend golfers like myself. At the moment, you're all in a dead heat for the position. My final selection of the new vice-president of Universal Products will be based on my observations at the golf course as much as on the material in your files."

Mark recalled Jenson's words now, as he signed in with the starter, and he felt his palms grow damp. It was a Wednesday morning, and he knew that he was the last candidate to golf with Jenson. He hoped that the weather wasn't an omen — the two previous days had been bright and sunny while this morning's sky was overcast with the threat of rain. Only a few other golfers were visible on the beautifully tended course, and no one else was near the starting tee.

If only he had a clearer idea of what Jenson was looking for in a new vice-president, Mark thought. Perhaps he should model himself after Charlie Lambert, who had recently succumbed to a coronary. Charlie had been a quiet and efficient executive with a keen

intelligence. Always soft-spoken and polite, he had also been known to display a merciless savagery when the situation called for it. A bachelor, Charlie's entire life had revolved around Universal Products. He was the company man personified.

And now Charlie's vacancy was to be filled from among the three assistant vice-presidents — Mark Collier, Leonard Hollingsworth, and Thomas White. Lately, Mark had spent a good deal of time mentally comparing himself to the other two men, and the result was invariably a stalemate. All three had been with the corporation for over twenty years and had worked their way up the executive ladder from minor positions. All were married men in their mid-forties. All were competent and ambitious. And each of them desperately wanted the vice-presidency with its new responsibilities, added prestige, and higher salary.

Yes, mark thought, this morning would decide his future.

At that moment, he spotted Howard Jenson walking toward him, pulling his golf cart. The president was a short, squat man with broad shoulders and a ruddy complexion. Though always pleasant, there was a cold glint in his blue eyes, and his ready smile seemed somehow mechanical. He waved at Mark, then ducked into the clubhouse. He reappeared almost immediately and strode

over to Mark.

"Good morning, Mark," he said, firmly shaking the younger man's hand. "I'm glad to see that you're on time. The weather looks a bit ominous, but maybe the rain will hold off for a couple hours. Would you rather walk the course, or should we take an electric car? It makes no difference to me."

Mark hesitated, suspecting that this was the first of several little tests he'd be given during the morning. He wondered which Jenson would prefer. Finally, he said, "Let's walk. The exercise will do us good."

"Fine," said Jenson, and Mark hoped that he hadn't given the impression that he was out-of-shape or in poor health.

"Go ahead and drive, Mark," Jenson commanded.

Struggling to appear relaxed, Mark pulled his driver from the bag and teed up a ball. He swung smoothly, and his ball soared into the distance, coming to rest near the center of the fairway.

"Nicely done, Mark," Jenson said, teeing his ball. "A fine start to the game."

Jenson's drive was high and straight, but it stopped several yards short of Mark's ball. This troubled the young executive. Maybe he would be wise to tone down his game so that Jenson's shots would outdistance his own. Should he do his best to play an honest round of golf, or would it

be to his best advantage to lose? It was only one of several questions weighing heavily on his mind.

The two men grabbed their carts and headed onto the fairway.

"The weather must have scared a lot of people off," Jenson commented. "The course is nearly deserted."

"Yes, it is," Mark agreed.

Their second shots put Mark's ball off to the right of the fairway and Jenson's a few yards in front of the green. Perhaps he wouldn't have to alter his game after all, Mark thought with relief. Jenson just might beat him without any assistance.

Jenson won the first hole with a par four, while Mark took a six. Mark jotted their scores on the card, and they proceeded to the second tee.

"You've got to be careful here," Jenson warned, nodding into the distance. "There's a creek running across the fairway that has swallowed an awful lot of my balls."

Jenson drove his ball powerfully, and it came to a halt a few yards from the edge of the creek. Mark's shot disappeared over the bank. A splash of water signaled its fate.

"See what I mean," Jenson chuckled. "We'll be crossing back over the creek again on the eighth hole."

The two men walked side by side toward the creek. When they

reached Jenson's ball, Mark glanced down the embankment and was surprised to see how rapidly the water flowed.

Jenson used his 5-wood to send the ball flying straight toward the green, then turned to Mark. "The creek meanders across the course and enters the forest over to the right there. About a mile off, it flows into Lake Arrowhead. The water is quite deep in spots, and the current is strong."

As they stepped toward the bridge, Mark was startled at the sight of a boy standing in the middle of the creek in water nearly up to his waist. He looked to be about twelve or thirteen years old and was wearing only a pair of cut-off blue jeans.

"You want to buy some golf balls?" he called out, jerking his blond head toward a pile on the bank. "A dozen for five bucks."

Jenson grinned at the boy and said, "Sure. I'm always willing to help out a young businessman."

As the boy counted out twelve balls, Jenson asked, "Do you grope around on the bottom of the river trying to find balls?"

"That's right, mister," the boy replied. "On good days, I might find as many as thirty balls. That's not counting the ones that get carried away by the current."

"You're in kind of a dangerous position, though," Mark said. "Aren't you afraid of being hit by a ball?"

The boy shrugged nonchalantly accepting a five dollar bill from Jenson.

"Every good businessman has to take chances, Mark," Jenson said firmly, and the young executive immediately regretted his comment.

"Thanks, son," Jenson said, as he stashed the balls in his bag. "Come see me in about ten years. I can always use a shrewd go-getter like yourself."

The boy appeared puzzled, but he smiled and said, "Sure thing, mister."

Mark and Jenson continued with their game, and all the while they played, Mark felt as if he were treading on eggs. He weighed his words carefully before speaking, but somehow he always seemed to say the wrong thing. Jenson was quick to contradict him. More than anything, Mark hoped to appear natural, poised, and confident, but he feared that he was creating exactly the opposite impression. He wondered if Hollingsworth and White had experienced similar doubts and anxieties.

By the time they reached the eighth tee an hour and fifteen minutes later, Jenson's score was 29 and Mark's 34. At least, he no longer had to worry about throwing the game, Mark reflected thankfully. But another possibility entered his mind and renewed his uneasiness. What if Jenson expected him to win?

There was no escape from worry.

As Jenson had forewarned, the eighth hole was a long par five which led back across the creek. Jenson's drive once again soared toward the middle of the fairway. His next shot would probably bring him to the water's edge.

Mark assumed his stance before the ball and took several deep breaths to relax the tension which had stiffened his last few swings. When he finally swung the club, his ball sliced to the right.

The sky was still bleak, but at least the rain had held off. Mark glanced around the course as he trudged toward his ball. Except for a foursome in the distance, there were no other golfers in sight.

Mark found his ball and looked over at Jenson, who was just about to shoot. The president swung smoothly, but his ball hooked to the left and disappeared into a mass of trees which lined the river. Mark experienced a momentary satisfaction. It was the first really bad shot Jenson had made all morning.

The creek was over a hundred yards away from Mark, but he wanted his ball to make it across in one shot. He yanked out a 3-wood and put all of his weight behind his swing. The ball stayed low as it sped toward the creek, then curved downward abruptly and disappeared over the embankment.

"Damn it to hell," Mark muttered, replacing the club in-

the bag.

As he walked toward the creek, Mark caught a glimpse of Jenson on the other side of the fairway, searching for his ball amidst the trees. The old man had millions, Mark thought, but he'd waste ten minutes looking for a lost golf ball.

Mark stepped over to the embankment, though he was certain that his ball had already been carried away by the current. He looked downward, and his breath caught in his throat.

The boy who retrieved golf balls from the creek lay sprawled on his back on the muddy bank. His legs dangled in the water. His eyes were half-open, staring dully at the gray sky, and a gash in his forehead oozed a thick stream of blood.

"Oh, my God," Mark moaned. "I've killed him."

There was no one else around who could have hit the fatal ball. Of course, it had been a terrible accident, but Mark realized at once that any chance he may have had for the vice-presidency had perished with the boy. There would be plenty of bad publicity, and Jenson would not dare to promote a man who reflected unfavorably on the corporation.

Mark glanced over his shoulder and spied Jenson still seeking his lost ball. An idea occurred to him which sickened him and yet offered salvation at the same time. If he were to shove the boy into the

creek, the current would carry his body toward the lake. No one would ever connect his tragic death with Mark.

Quickly, the young executive crossed the bridge and scurried down the embankment on the other side. With his foot, he nudged the boy's body out into the creek. A moment later, it drifted slowly away in the current, then reached faster water and became nearly hidden beneath the churning surface.

There was no trace of the boy now except for the pile of balls he'd recovered from the creek. Mark decided to leave them untouched. His death would surely be labeled accidental, and any official investigation would be limited. They would conclude that the boy had been struck and killed by a golf ball and that his body had been carried away by the current before the golfer arrived. The golfer would have continued with his game, oblivious to what had actually happened.

Mark climbed the embankment back onto the fairway. Jenson had either found his ball or decided to play another one, for he was swinging his club just as Mark looked over at him. The president's ball arched over the creek and plopped in the center of the fairway.

Mark drew a ball from his bag and dropped it near the edge of the creek. His hands felt clammy, and his stomach churned. He had

certainly not meant to kill the boy, but he knew that he was guilty of covering up the deed. And yet what choice did he have? If Jenson knew the truth, his chance for the promotion would be shattered.

Act natural and relaxed, Mark commanded himself as he addressed the ball. You're guilty of nothing but self-preservation. The boy was a fool to be standing in the creek at all. What happened might have happened to anybody.

Mark's swing was flawless. The ball flew directly toward the green, landed, and rolled to a stop less than a foot from the cup.

"Beautiful shot," Jenson shouted as he crossed the bridge. "Your finest shot of the day, Mark."

"Thanks," Mark muttered. But he felt no pride in his accomplishment. Since putting the dead boy into the creek, everything in Mark's life seemed to have faded to the same dull gray as the sky.

The remainder of the game passed quickly, and Mark found himself playing more smoothly than ever before. Perhaps it was because he no longer really cared, he thought. He had slain a young boy and covered up the act. In light of that deed, the promotion and his career seemed of little consequence.

Besides, if he were to be honest with himself, Mark had picked up enough vibrations from Jenson along the way to realize that he

probably wouldn't be awarded the vice-presidency anyway.

On the ninth green, Mark sank a fifteen foot putt, and Jenson whistled appreciately.

"You've really found your stride these last couple of holes, Mark," the president said.

Mark nodded but made no reply. He walked off the green and slipped his putter into the bag. A moment later, Jenson appeared beside him.

"You know, Mark," he said, "I'd just about made up my mind of offer Hollingsworth the vice-presidency. You didn't do much to change my decision until the eighth hole. But now I've come to the conclusion that you're the man for the position. I can see that you're vice-presidential material."

Mark stared into Jenson's face. "Why did you change your mind?" he asked in a flat tone.

"I saw what happened after you accidentally killed that boy," Jenson said with admiration in his voice. "From where I stood, I saw your ball hit him. Then I sneaked a few glances your way once you'd discovered what you'd done. You handled it smoothly and competently and then went on to play the best golf of the day. You really came through when the pressure was on."

Mark opened his mouth to speak, but he could think of nothing to say.

"No explanations are necessary," Jenson said. He smiled and extended his hand. "Congratulations, Mark. You're a company man all the way."

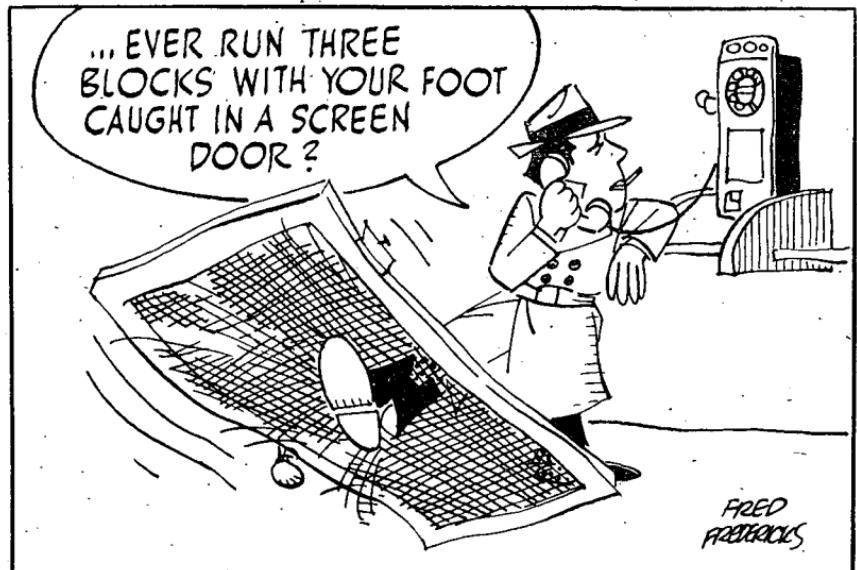
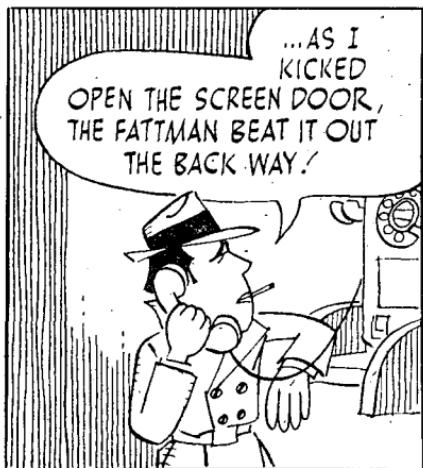
STRANGE,

BUT TRUE.

A "fair play for rabbits" law passed in 1927 in Wyoming gave rabbits within the boundaries of the state the right to bear arms and defend themselves against hunters. Citizens of Wyoming were alarmed, fearing unscrupulous rabbits would take advantage of the law and gun down innocent citizens. This, however, was not the case. Not a single bunny has even purchased a gun since the law was passed!

MIKE SHAMUS

by FRED FREDERICKS



ED NOON'S MINUTE MYSTERIES

“THE GREAT ZAMPA HOAX”

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

I went with Theo Collins the night I saw the Great Zampa in action. Normally, I'm not interested in swamis or tea leaf readers or mystics who claim they could communicate with the grave. Theo Collins felt the same way, but unfortunately her mother, rich, old Mrs. Collins was paying through the nose to the Great Zampa, who had promised to bring back the voice if not the face of the dear, dead departed Colonel Collins.

Theo had been just a leggy kid when the Colonel had cashed in his chips and as much as she'd like to have seen the old coot, she just didn't believe the Great Zampa could do it. I didn't think so either, but Theo was paying me a fat fee to prove it.

But old lady Collins would be furious if she suspected that her daughter was sacking a private eye on her pet mystic. So, for the evening, I was Theo's boy friend.

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Which was nice work anyway. She was as cute as a thousand dollar bill.

We arrived at the Great Zampa's stone house at eight-thirty sharp. The seance was at nine. A gloomy-faced servant ushered us into the seance room where old lady Collins was already communicating a thick wad of money to the Great Zampa. Theo snorted in disgust and introduced me. Mrs. Collins sniffed skeptically and the black eyes of the Great Zampa were cool and properly mysterious in the dark face under an enormous turban.

We made small talk until nine o'clock. Then the servant came in and solemnly drew the drapes as we gathered around a circular table. I had already checked the place as much as I could for trick wiring and phony lighting without much luck.

The Great Zampa called for silence and we all clammed up.

There was just the four of us — Theo, Mrs. Collins, Zampa and me. The room darkened and Zampa spoke in a low, droning voice calling for the Colonel to come back, telling him that someone wanted to talk to him. It was shivery all right. In the gloom the faces around me were all pale and ghostly. And when the Great Zampa stopped talking and a scratchy, thin voice broke the brief silence. Mrs. Collins gasped and started moaning: "Larry, Larry, is it really you . . . ?"

"Yes," the voice came back.
"Peggy, it's so good to hear your
voice again — "

The voice scratched on and I stopped listening. I was looking and feeling under the table because I'd heard this sort of junk before. Theo Collins' hand was in mind so I carefully unhooked it and placed it in the hand of her mother who was on my other side. Theo made a movement, but she must have understood what I was doing because she shut up before she blurted out something.

I eased away from the table in the gloom towards the lights and

snapped them on. The effect was startling. Theo and Mrs. Collins screamed and froze where they were. But the Great Zampa, eyes closed, was bent backwards in a listening position, and what was crazier, old Colonel Collins' dead voice was still talking but getting fainter and fainter. And then nothing. Mrs. Collins sprang to her feet with tears in her eyes, calling me every name under the sun, shocking even her smart young daughter Theo. Then Zampa snapped out of his trance and seeing me by the light switch, pinned me with scornful eyes. He started calling me names too — like unbeliever, fraud and junk like that. But I wasn't listening. I ran around the room, turning over cushions, kicking the drapes apart, looking for wires and record players.

I was getting embarrassed because I found nothing but knew that no one could speak from the grave, in this or any other year. The Great Zampa was imperiously asking me to leave when I got it. How he had resurrected old Colonel Collins, I mean. And it was staring me right in the face.

THE SOLUTION

The enormous turban on the Great Zampa's head contained a tape recorder, which was controlled by simple adjustments with the hand. In the dark, no one would see Zampa manipulating the thing. The Colossus voice had been easy enough to imitate because he'd been in old newsreels often enough to know how to find out how he talked. So Mrs. Collins got her money back. Theo was satisfied she'd hired me and I wound up with that nice fat fee.

Man With The Cigarette

by ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

Forbes was like a madman, running everywhere, trying to fight the fire. One woman grabbed him, shouting, "Help me find my daughter! Some monster started this and robbed me of my child!" Forbes still shouts those words in his sleep!

THE SANITARIUM was a rest home in the true sense of the term. There were no bars, guards, strait jackets or shock devices. With its green hills, tall trees, bowling green, tennis and badminton courts and swimming pool, it had all the earmarks of a mountain resort. Its residents had money — and trouble. In most cases the trouble was a nervous breakdown.

Only a few patients (my uncle told me) had deeper problems, but in no case was there violence.

I had gone there to visit Uncle Ted — on the verge of a breakdown himself earlier this year — and it wasn't until we were lunching in the dining room that I noticed anyone that struck me as being out of the ordinary. The man was in his fifties, a somber-

visaged person alone at a table.

While he ate with his right hand he retained an unlit cigarette in his left, holding it scant inches from his mouth as though at any moment he might take a puff.

I made no mention of the oddity to Uncle. If the man wished to eat while holding an unlit cigarette in his hand it was certainly his own business. Perhaps he was one of those inveterate smokers who can't wait to dispatch their meal in order to get to the next cigarette.

We finished our lunch and had our coffee served on the terrace. While we stood at the railing, overlooking the tennis court, the man with the cigarette wandered our way.

"Hello, Forbes," my uncle said cheerfully. "May I introduce my nephew?"

We shook hands and I said, "How-do-you-do, Sir," and he said nothing. It struck me that the poor devil might've run out of matches and was too shy to ask for a light, so I reached in my pocket and fished out a kitchen match, struck it and held the flame to his cigarette.

In pin-point size the flame was instantly repeated in the dilating iris of his eyes, and without warning his right hand seized my wrist.

"Look there . . . my bed is ablaze," he said, staring at the flame.

Uncle leaned forward and blew the match out. "It's all right,

Forbes," he said reassuringly. "It's out now." Then to me, low: "Dunk the match in your coffee. Let him see you do it."

"In my coffee?" I protested. However, prompted by Forbes' rapt gaze on the thin coil of smoke from the match, I dunked the blackened head in my coffee cup.

Uncle said amiably, "It's all out. Everything shipshape now."

Forbes nodded slowly. "Yes, it's out, isn't it?" Then he released my wrist and walked off, still bearing the unlit cigarette.

"Unfortunate example of guilt complex," Uncle said. "The sad part is it could have all been avoided. It was just a matter of perverse timing."

Frowning at my ruined coffee, I said, "Evidently you've heard his case history from someone here?"

"Yes. Do you remember the Morro Castle — or were you too young?"

"I've heard of it. Passenger liner that burned on the Atlantic coast before I was born, wasn't it?"

"About thirty years ago. Forbes was only in his early twenties at the time. Rich family. Brilliant mind. He'd been working on some sort of advanced mathematical problem. Worked himself into a breakdown. That's why he was on the Morro Castle; he was in a rather bad way and his family thought a sea voyage would help."

"At any rate, the first he knew of the fire was when he discovered

his bedspread was ablaze. He panicked and tried to beat it out with his hands. He managed to burn himself severely and spread the fire to other parts of his cabin. He stumbled out only to be met on deck by a veritable holocaust."

Uncle paused for a reflective moment, then went on: "I understand that for sheer mass panic it was the worst ever perpetrated by a single disaster, affecting crew as well as passengers. The captain, as you may have heard, ran the ship full speed for shore. A mistake because the draft incited the flames to greater activity. Forbes was like a madman, running everywhere, trying to fight the fire and to get the passengers to abandon ship. One woman grabbed him, shouting, 'Help me find my daughter! Some monster started this and robbed me of my child!' They say that Forbes still shouts those words in his sleep."

"Did the ship reach shore?" I asked.

"I believe it was run sideways into the shore. Horrified, helpless spectators were on the beach watching passengers running wildly through the flames and smoke on deck. Even the ones wearing life jackets were too rattled to jump overboard and wade ashore. Forbes pleaded and cursed and fought to push them overboard, but they turned on him like wild animals and threw him overboard. That saved his life but

I really believe he wanted to die on the Morro Castle."

"But why?"

"Because Forbes believes he started the fire and no amount of explanation will help. You see, he was in his cabin, reading in bed when he picked up a cigarette and lit a match. But before he could light the cigarette the steward knocked on the door. I told you Forbes' thinking was not totally rational; instead of first lighting the cigarette and *then* answering the door, he shook the match out and dropped it into the ashtray he had on his bed . . . or thought he did. But the match was not out and it did not land in the ashtray. Forbes reached the door, opened it, but before the steward could speak, Forbes glanced back over his shoulder and saw that his bedspread was on fire.

"Look there . . . my bed is ablaze!" he shouted, and he ran to fight the flames."

"I see," I said slowly. "Forbes is the victim of an association of ideas." I thought about it for a moment, then said, "He never did get to light that cigarette."

"That's right," Uncle said.

"Oh, you mentioned perverse timing. What did you mean?"

Uncle's smile was sad. "Only that if he had listened to the steward before noticing the burning bedspread, he wouldn't feel guilty. The steward came to tell him the ship was on fire." ●

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A Passing Stranger

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Life in the quiet valley had been uneventful for Susan — until Bill arrived. He changed her life, and the nuclear power plant he'd come to build would change all their lives!

SHE HAD LIVED A LONG TIME in the shady valley by the river, rarely seeing anyone but the people who lived there with her, viewing occasional passing strangers with all the fabled awe of a child at her first circus. A long time, measured by the awareness of an eighteen-year-old girl who'd known no other life but the life of the valley.

Nothing ever changed there, except the seasons. For as long as she could remember, the wind had whistled through the rushes at the water's edge, and the gulls from the sea had circled among the topmost limbs of the trees, doing constant battle with the land birds who made their homes there. She'd grown up, attending school in the village with a dozen other farm children from the valley, content that one day followed another and that lately there were boys working in the fields who noticed her and sometimes whistled.

Her aunt had spoken once of sending her off to college, but of course that was out of the question. She did not have the brains for more schooling, nor did her family have the money. And so that summer was spent in wandering about the valley, exploring every slanted hillside, every reed-crested tributary. And there were always the household chores to be performed — lessons in sewing and cooking from a diligent mother who knew her daughter must marry some day soon.

But the mornings were always free, to romp down the broad hills as she'd done since childhood, seeking, searching out any overnight change in her grassy valley. Thus, in the late spring of her eighteenth year, she was the first to see the trucks when they arrived.

They stood just off the road, hubcap-deep in grass that was never cut, waiting like giant

armored beetles for their summons. And soon there came swarms of men with digging equipment and finally the steel-hatted engineers with their shabby rolls of well-thumbed blueprints.

And the thing began to take shape before her eyes that summer, scarring the valley earth and changing the lives of them all. They called it an atomic power plant, and she watched it all with wonder. No one in her family talked much about the thing that had come to their valley, not after the first few days. She thought they liked to pretend it wasn't really there at all, but of course it was. She saw it every morning just after dawn, when she hurried to the top of the rise and stared down at the scurrying workmen who labored day and night to complete it.

One morning very early, as she stood on the hillside feeling the wind on her face, she met Bill Langly.

There was something in his young eyes she's never seen before — a depth, a compassion perhaps, that was lacking in the people of the valley. And his hair, long and blond and alive in the wind, held a special charm for her. "What's your name, girl?" he'd asked, appearing suddenly on the hill in front of her.

"I . . . Susan." She began twisting a leaf nervously, already seeing what was in those eyes. "You're one of the workmen from

down there."

"That's right. Name's Bill Langly. You got a last name?"

"Dane. Susan Dane."

"Susan Dane. A nice name. It rolls off the tongue." He lowered himself to the grass beside her legs, stretching out his arms to the sky. "I've seen you on the hill in the mornings, Susan. I've seen you for so many mornings that I finally had to get a look close up."

"Was it worth it?" she asked, fishing for a compliment.

"It was worth it."

She sat down on the grass beside him, feeling the dampness through the fabric of her jeans. "What is it down there?" she asked.

"Atomic power plant. Energy for this valley, energy to build new cities."

"Shouldn't you be down there working?"

"I'm on my break." He lit a cigarette and sent the dead match spinning into the damp grass with an easy, casual gesture. "Why do you come here every morning?" he asked.

"I guess because I have nothing else to do. I'm out of school and there's no place to work in the valley, except on the farm with my folks."

He was silent for a moment, just smoking. Then he said, "Could I come see you? It's a lonely place out here."

"I suppose you could," she

answered, feeling a sort of thrill at the sudden flowering of this chance encounter. He was not like the boys she'd known at school. Not at all like them.

And so he came to the neat little farmhouse where she lived with her family. He came on the very next evening, explaining that he didn't have a car of his own but he'd borrowed one from a buddy on the job. They went to a movie in town first, and afterwards drove to a little bar the workers had discovered. It was the first bar she'd ever been in, a dank and musty place where the bartender had bad breath and didn't ask her age. She'd had beer before, at home, so she was prepared for the acrid taste of it.

On the way home he parked on a side road the high school boys liked, and she was surprised he'd heard of it so quickly. She wondered which of the village girls, on a date with him, might have directed him here. She asked him and he laughed, but he didn't answer.

"Do you like what you're doing?" she asked later, when they'd separated for a cigarette.

"Right now, or on the job?"

"Both, I guess," she answered with a giggle. "But I really meant the job."

"In a way I hate it. Sometimes I dream about a nuclear power plant blowing up and this whole valley being destroyed."

She felt a sudden chill. "Could that happen?"

"They claim not. They claim it's the safest thing going."

"But you don't believe them."

"Sometimes I don't. I guess a lot of people stopped believing governments a long time ago."

"Forget about it now," she pleaded, frightened by ideas she didn't fully understand. "Forget about it while you're with me."

And for a time he did forget about it.

THE SUMMER WAS GOOD to them, as it always is to the young. They saw each other two or three times a week, and there were even occasional weekends to be spent at the faraway beach on Grand Island, in a world Susan hardly knew existed. Once they spent a whole day and much of the evening splashing in the shallow water, and then dancing, still in wet bathing suits, at a little beach-front pizza parlor where young people gathered around an ancient neonated juke box to forget about growing up.

It was later that same night when Bill talked once more about the power plant he was building. "The reactor goes in next week," he said. "They'll be testing it soon."

"Does that bother you?"

"Everything about the place bothers me. I wrote to a professor I had in college — a man I admired a great deal — and asked him

what I could do. He only wrote back a little note suggesting I find another job. Are we that helpless, Susan? Are we?"

"I don't know," she answered, because she was losing him again. She loved his body, not his mind.

"The individual is nothing any more, nothing at all."

"Stop talking about those things, Bill. I don't like to hear it. I don't like to think about something ruining our valley."

"It's already ruined. It'll never be the way it was — never! That power plant will outlast us all."

"So what can you do about it? What can you do about it?" There was a touch of anger in her voice.

"I don't know," he admitted. "Maybe nothing."

It was more than a week later when he spoke of it again. This time they were together in his borrowed car, and though the night was warm and pleasant she was aware of his remoteness. He drove to the dirt road that ran along the ridge overlooking the power plant, and then parked so they could look down at the random lights of the night work crew.

Suddenly he told her, "I'm thinking of blowing it up."

Her body froze on the seat next to him, and suddenly he was a stranger. "What do you mean? You must be kidding!"

"I'm not. I was never more serious in my life."

"But why?"

"So I can speak out. So I can

get on the witness stand at my trial and speak for all the world to hear. They'd listen then. I'd tell them what they were doing, how they were destroying us all with their power plants and their lies."

"There must be some other way, Bill." The fear was in her heart like a cold coiled serpent.

"How? Write some more letters? I tried that."

"But you can't blow it up!"

"I read a book once about an architect who blew up a building he'd designed. It was a statement of what he believed in. That book — I think it was *The Fountainhead* — has stayed with me ever since I read it."

"Don't talk about it any more," she pleaded. "Let's get away from this place."

They went away, and danced and drank beer, and gazed up at the stars. And for a brief time all was well again.

As the August days faded into September, she took to wandering the fields once more, watching the morning birds circle and dive in the breeze, hearing the field animals scurry for shelter as she approached. It was a simple, beautiful life, as long as she avoided the ridge above the power plant.

But then one morning the headlines were in the paper. There had been a nuclear accident at a power plant near Detroit. Nothing serious, no lives lost, but it had been close. "Did you see it?" he

asked. "In the paper?"

"I saw it."

"I'm going to do it," he said quietly. "Tonight."

"Bill — "

"My mind's made up. I've already got the explosives."

"They'll say you're mad."

"But they'll listen." He smiled at her. "And maybe I *am* a little mad. I want to keep this valley safe for you and all the people here."

"I'll tell you them about it, Bill. I'll do anything to stop you."

He gripped her arm. "Would you? Would you betray me? When I want to bring sanity to this world?"

"How can blowing up that plant bring sanity? I don't understand, Bill. Maybe I'll never understand."

"Then trust me — that's all I ask."

"I don't know what to do!"

"Susan, by tomorrow it'll be all over. I'll be under arrest, but you'll come to see me, won't you?"

She tried to turn away but couldn't. "Of course I will," she replied at last. "I'll come to see you, and I'll be waiting when you get out." The words sounded good on her lips. They sounded believing, hopeful of a truth she could not comprehend. She only knew she loved him, and that truth gave birth to other truths. He was a dreamer, an idealist in a world that didn't need him. He

was even a criminal, perhaps. But she knew he wasn't insane. He believed in what he was doing, and now she believed too.

After he left her, she thought about him through the next hours. Once she went to the telephone and lifted it to give a warning, but then the mood passed. If she couldn't trust Bill, there was no one to trust, no one to believe in. Just maybe the world would listen when he spoke.

Listen to one man's angry protest.

She went outside and stood for a long time beneath the September stars, feeling the warmth of the night, feeling his arms around her once more.

Somehow it reassured her that everything would be all right.

SHE HEARD ABOUT IT on the radio the following morning. Bill had been shot and killed by a guard at the plant as he attempted to hide his explosives. That was all there was to it.

She thought of him often in the days that followed, and once again she took to climbing the ridge in the morning to stare down at the big concrete building. Before too long, in the autumn of that year, the memory of Bill Langly finally began to fade.

She never told anybody about him, because there was really nothing to tell. He had only been a stranger passing through her life.

The Enigma of Andrew Marler

by MEL D. AMES

Would you like to read an old-fashioned, scary ghost story?
Welcome to Brookside Cemetery!

BROOKSIDE CEMETERY lay hidden like a forgotten park some two miles from the city limits, sufficiently out of sight and mind to be of no concern to anyone but the dead and the dying. It was not a place where one came willingly. No one, that is, but Judson Marler, resident caretaker and his wife Emily.

"The house comes with the job," Judson had said to her on the day they arrived, "I hope you don't mind."

"Mind?"

"Living here at the cemetery. I mean — it's not exactly something you'd find in *Better Homes And Gardens.*"

"Darling, I understand."

"Then you're not nervous about it?"

"Should I be?"

"No." His voice was reassuring. "No, of course not."

The house stood just inside a high wrought-iron fence that encompassed the grounds. It was a relic of a place, profusely shuttered and gargoyleed, with wide mossy eaves that overhung the narrow windows like darkly furrowed brows. The one rambling structure housed the administrative office as well as the living quarters, and Emily found that she could pass from one area to the other simply by traversing an immense storeroom which stood between them. This repository had become a grim kind of catch-all for all manner of graveyard paraphernalia, and when the need

arose, it also functioned as a mortuary. Unhappily, the need had already arisen, just seven days after their arrival. Something of a house-warming, Emily thought wryly — an irreverence that came unbidden to her mind and was instantly regretted. For in the adjoining room, at that precise moment (*with but a single sliding door between*) Andrew Marler, son of Judson, lay dead in his casket.

She was alone now. The sounds of prowlers had drawn Judson from the house anxious minutes before, and she was left with the measured tick of the clock on the mantel and the uneven swell of her own breathing. She went to the window for some sign of him, but the dark night had made a mirror of the glass and she saw only the frail reflection of her own image, tall and slender, staring back in at her. Then turning away, she found herself facing the heavy velvet portiere that shrouded the door to the mortuary; and in her mind's eye, in spite of an outraged sense of normality, she conjured up the still, deathly form stretched out beyond it. An involuntary shudder passed through her body. She must not let this thing get the better of her.

Dear Judson. The news of Andrew's death had been a bitter shock. More so, coming the very day of their arrival at Brookside. He had died violently, they were

informed, aboard ship, just two days out of New York, enroute from Europe. Shot through the heart. Judson had fretted terribly until arrangements could be made to have the body sent home for burial.

He had not been a good man, Andrew Marler. An international Jewel thief, the newspapers had called him; *Mr. X*, they said, of some illicit diamond syndicate, thought by police to have been responsible for the theft and the subsequent disposal of a particular rare diamond, reportedly missing from a noted foreign collection. To Emily, it all seemed so theatrical. They had found no diamonds on him at the time of his death, nor on his killer, who had been apprehended moments later. It made you wonder, she thought, about the veracity of those news people. One fanciful reporter had suggested that Andrew had undergone plastic surgery in Europe, concealing the stone beneath his skin in order to thwart the customs authorities. When she had read this portion of it out to Judson, he had shown his annoyance.

"Damn meddlers," he said, in his quiet but meaningful way. "Why can't they mind their own business?"

Judson had told her then how Andrew had been in an automobile accident some years ago, with his mother, the first Mrs. Marler. She had been killed outright, he said, and although Andrew had

come away with his life, his face had been badly disfigured and he had lost the sight of one eye. Judson felt that this was largely responsible for his son's emotional instability. At any rate, the boy had never been the same after the accident, and on the premise that plastic surgery would be a kind of psychotherapy, Judson had made the necessary arrangements in the hope of rehabilitating his son to a happier way of life. Andrew had gone to Europe for that one purpose, and none other, Judson had affirmed.

Emily took a cigarette from the silver-lidded box on the mantel, then poked about in the bottom for a match. When she found one and lit it, she had difficulty bringing the flame and the end of the cigarette together. She inhaled deeply. Judson had been gone now for over thirty minutes.

Andrew's body had arrived early that morning without ceremony, in a crudely-made shipping crate, probably of ship-board origin. She had been with Judson when he opened it. There was no disfigurement then; the face she saw was darkly handsome. But in helping Judson lift the body from the rough box to the casket, the one cadaverous eye closest to her had inched slowly open and fixed her with a cold malevolent stare. She sucked in her breath in sudden horror.

"Ahhhh!"

Judson had been quick to close

the casket. He calmed her with the explanation that the recent surgery had doubtlessly affected the musculature surrounding the eye. She felt embarrassment then, at her childish lack of composure, but she remained shaken by the incident for some time. It was not as though Andrew had been her own son.

Emily ran nervous fingers through her short dark hair, tossing her head as though to rid herself of the memory. She glanced at the ring on her finger, the one Judson had given her, turning her head so that the large bluish diamond caught the light and danced in it before her eyes. She wondered how anyone could bring themselves to kill for the glitter of a thing so cold. What was it Judson had said? *A diamond is not bright in itself; it must have light to make it sparkle.*

This was one of the endearing things that first had attracted her to Judson. He had a certain way of saying things, that made them irrevocably *so*. And he was a kindly man, she thought with affection, and gentle. He was also tall, and really quite good looking, she decided, with his prematurely grey hair; or striking, perhaps, in a dignified, indrawn way.

She could not say what made her look up, just at that precise moment, but as she raised her eyes, all the terror she had felt that morning returned in a rush.

Fear gripped her like a clammy hand and her skin shrank and prickled under an icy sweat. At the window, as though reflected in the polished glass, was the spectral image of Andrew Marler gaping out at her, the one open eye glinting awesomely.

She whirled, thinking the thing behind her. There was nothing. Only the intimidating bulk of the portiere. (*Did she imagine a slight movement in the deep velvet folds?*) Her hair felt to be lifting out of her scalp of its own volition as she made a supreme effort, forcing herself to turn and look back at the window. The apparition, or whatever, was gone.

Impulsively, she put her back to the mantel where she could command a view of both the window and the portiere; flight was unthinkable. Now, God forbid, she would see it coming. (*See what coming?*) The clock, now close behind her, clicked and clacked with a deafening indiscretion — through which the availing silence advanced and receded with torturing brevity — shattering all hope of audient forewarning. (*Of what?*) She inched a little to her left, away from the clock, but maintaining her vantage point.

This was madness.

An eternity elapsed before reason had noticeably diluted her panic. Then she wilted, abruptly, feeling herself uncomfortably moist and warm under her

clothing. She was spent. Her nerve ends curled like a million maggots under the surface of her skin, and she could smell the debris of her fear rising up off her dank body. She had imagined it, of course; there could be no other explanation.

She cast a fearful glance toward the portiere. There was no other way. With a resolve that surprised her, she moved toward it, resisting an urgent desire to look behind. She knew that if she was to do this thing, she must do it quickly. In a swoop, she had drawn the heavy drape and exposed the naked door behind it. It opened stiffly, with a noisy grating sound that echoed in the hollow darkness of the mortuary.

There was an aura of death in the room; she could feel it, smell it, hear it in the sinister quiet that hung low against the floor. And as she switched on the light, she could see it in the shape of the ornate, leaden-looking casket that (*praise God*) contained the lifeless form of Andrew Marler.

She moved mechanically toward it, determined not to waver in her purpose. At the side of the casket she paused, fraught and with dread; then in a burst of resolve, she quickly raised the lid. She had steeled herself to look again upon the dead, even to the agony of that piercing eye that could not or would not close in death; but she had not prepared herself for this. Her mind suddenly began

to convulse in violent surges of blood and blinding light, and she seemed to hang there, suspended in the horrified air, before slumping to the floor in a senseless heap.

The casket was empty.

"EMILY — EMILY, DEAR."

It was Judson, rubbing her wrists, patting the backs of her hands. She was in their bedroom, atop her own twin bed.

"Emily, what did you do?"

His face, shining down on her like a morning sun, was bright with calm; but then, to cloud her thoughts, came the memory of that fearful image, risen from its death bed. She blurted it all out to him, the way it had happened, seeing as she did so, the tolerant disbelief in his eyes. She was annoyed by it, this scepticism; it was as though she were a child being mildly admonished by a condescending adult. But, too, she knew a measure of relief, and for this she was grateful.

"Poor dear," he said.

"But I saw it, Judson. I know I did."

He shook his head slowly, kindly. "I closed the casket when I found you there. Nothing was changed."

She clung to him. "Oh, Judson, whatever is happenneing to me?"

His quiet voice was reassuring. "You're overwrought, my dear, that's all. It's been a trying time. I should not have left you alone."

Composing himself, she said, "I thought you were never coming back."

He was apologetic. "I didn't intend to be so long."

"Did you see anything?"

His eyes narrowed imperceptibly. "No," he said.

Later, when she had dressed for bed, he brought her a cup of hot chocolate and a sleeping tablet (to take the edge off her nerves, he said) then stayed with her, talking, while she swallowed the pill and dawdled over her chocolate. She felt relaxed with him now (she always did), having accepted as well she might, his explanation of her disquieting experience. What had seemed so vivid at the time, became dreamlike in retrospect, lacking the substance of reality, so that she began to wonder whether it had ever been anything more than a very unpleasant nightmare.

Then when he left her, briefly this time, to make his final rounds, locking doors, extinguishing lights; she felt the uneasiness again, like a thing chained and drugged, stirring darkly in the bottom of her mind. But it was not until they had both retired, and she lay there only half aware in the twilight of consciousness, lulled by the rhythmic sounds of Judson's breathing, that her fear resurrected itself in all its appalling intensity. For now, from without the bedroom window, with terrifying clarity, came the

stealthy *crunch, crunch* of footsteps on the gravelled walk, advancing to a point just outside the window, hesitating there, then moving on into obscurity. Moments later, inspite of her dread, she succumbed to the drug, and slept.

EMILY AWOKE with the knowledge that she was alone in the room, before ever opening her eyes. She had not heard him get up, but a furtive glance at Judson's empty bed confirmed her fears. It was dark, save for a narrow shaft of light that was driven like a wedge through the partly open door. Strange. The hall light could not have had that effect; it would tend more to diffuse its light into the bedroom, making pale shapes of the furnishings. Nor could it be from the front room. This light, she was certain, could be emanating from only one source — the mortuary.

She sat up quickly, feeling the same ugly dread that had haunted her before. When would it end? She did not feel up to another shock, imagined or otherwise, the like of which he had just survived, not once, but on three separate occasions, all in the space of a few short hours. She thought of calling Judson's name, but she could not bring herself to shatter the fragile quiet. She had no choice then but to go in search of him.

In housecoat and slippers, she

went noiselessly down the hall. The portiere, she saw, was drawn, and the door to the mortuary gapped open. She moved resolutely on. When she came abreast of the open door she breathed a sigh of relief. She could see Judson's familiar figure bending over the open coffin, his back to her. He was wearing his housecoat and pajamas, and she thought he looked to be praying. But as she came into the room, she could see him deeply engrossed in some activity within the casket. He was completely unaware of her until she had moved to within a foot of the casket. And then when he looked at her, she screamed!

The face that turned toward her was her husband's face, but the eyes were those of a madman. It was as though some beast of a thing had put on a Judson Marler mask, a sick and evil likeness, and stood there now in ghastly pretense.

When she saw down into the casket, her face became the color of chalk. Slowly, like the going out of a gas lamp, her eyes glazed over in abject horror, and she opened her mouth in a long and terrible ear-piercing scream that rang and echoed madly through the room, bounding off walls and ceiling as if the place was suddenly aswarm with the spirits of the very damned, all wailing in unison.

Where once had lain the last remains of Andrew Marler, in

dignity and death, there now was manifest a spectacle so grim, her mind could not accept it; a thing once human, but desecrated now beyond all knowing. Emily choked for breath, then screamed again in a long lament. Again, and again she screamed, powerless to stop. And above the din of her own voice, as though from a great distance, she heard the sounds of pounding on the outer door, of voices raised in alarm. Judson, the while, had not moved. He stood there, bent and unseeing, unhearing, utterly absorbed in his appalling task.

"MRS. MARLER — Mrs. Marler, it's all right now. We're the police. No need to be frightened."

A bulky shadow of a man had her in a firm grip, and she felt the sting of his hand against her face. "She's in a bad way, Mike."

And she saw the other man then, forcing Judson back from the casket. She saw him look down into it, grimace. "Good Lord," he said.

She could hear their voices, knowing what they said, understanding them but she could not respond. Shock had struck her dumb. It was as if her body had become a hard, unyielding shell, in which her mind still raced in a wild frenzy.

"We stake-out all night," said Mike, "and what do we come up with? One ghoul, not a sign of the syndicate boys, and one you-

name-it. Take a look in the coffin, Al."

Al took a look. "Oh my God," he said.

The man lowered Emily to the floor, gently, pillowing his rolled-up coat under her head. She lay there, motionless,unable to do otherwise. And from this worm's-eye view she watched the men who appeared to have grown long, long legs and tiny heads, their voices hollow and distant.

"He must have bought that story we planted in the newspapers," said Al, "or maybe they were in cahoots all the time. Never figured on this, though — Jeez, his own son — "

She could see Judson, handcuffed now, standing back alone. He kept muttering incoherently under his breath.

"We should've stopped him," Mike said, "when we saw him lugging the corpse out to the garage. That's where he must have started this mess — "

Emily suddenly realized she had not the dead to fear, then or now. Remembering the face at the window, she knew now what must have happened. To get from the mortuary to the garage, Judson would have had to take the gravel path that led under the front window. It had not been the face of the prowler she had seen but that of his grisly burden. If she could just communicate in some way with these men —

"I wanted to give him enough

rope," said Al. "Besides, how's he going to harm a corpse?"

"Be my guest," Mike said.

Emily's eyes danced with emotion.

"But one thing sure," Mike went on, "he didn't find no diamond. Man, how that must have bugged him, getting him out of bed in the middle of the night to have another go at it."

The one called Al gathered Emily up in his arms. "We'd better get this one to a doctor," he said, "I've seen shock cases like this before." He glanced sidelong at the casket. "Put the lid on that, will you, Mike? And bring the creep along. We're getting out of here."

As she was carried from the

room, and the lid of the casket was lowered for all eternity, Emily caught a last look at that one malevolent orb, full round now, and lidless, perched in the exposed eye socket like a billiard ball in the corner pocket; and as the descending lid gradually reduced the light, the knowing, life-like glint in the eye of Andrew Marler dimmed and died. And then, like only one other, she knew, *she knew* — but she could not speak of it more than he. And she felt almost sorry for the miserable creature that was being led away from his gruesome quest. For was it not Judson himself who had said: *"A diamond is not bright in itself; it must have light to make it sparkle."*

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

The manufacture of an atomic bomb, once a closely-guarded secret known only to top government brass and nuclear physicists, can be accomplished by any person of average intelligence using ordinary objects found around the house. All it takes is a few hours time and the knowledge of how to put together such commonly used substances as aspirin, brown vinegar, chunky peanut butter, unpitted olives, and several bottles of Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. "It's not generally known," admitted Dr. Robert Rinehart, Professor of Physics at Parnell University, "that certain brands of aspirin contain minute quantities of Uranium U-235, and if you get enough of the pills together (oh, I'd say roughly four thousand), combine them with the other substances and shake vigorously — " He smiled grimly. "Well, all I can say is: Look out!"

Bells

by GARY ARPIN

The bells of Los Campanillas del Dios make a lot of noise. It keeps a person awake sometimes, that noise — that and the persistent thoughts of money and death!

IT'S HARD TO KNOW where to begin. This is just a simple success story — something to while away the time — but it covers a lot of ground.

I'll start with the present — Los Campanillas del Dios, charming fishing village on the Mexican Gulf coast. Quiet, except for the bells, fairly friendly to outsiders like me, picturesque. Idyllic. I am staying with Jessica a few miles outside of town, waiting for her husband Mitch to come back from Mexico City with a substantial chunk of money for me. At which point, Jessica and I will leave this idyllic situation to Mitch.

It's a far cry from a sterile prison ward in Geneva.

"Poor dear," Jessica said the first night we were alone together here, "you must have been tormented. Absolutely alone. Surrounded by all those mad-

men."

"If they hadn't declared me unfit, I'd probably be dead," I said.

"You *did* do it, didn't you?" We were lying in my bed, cool in the air-conditioning. A long way from Geneva. "You did kill them. What was it? A family?"

"I didn't kill anyone. It was a man and his nephew, they said. I don't even remember seeing them."

"That's why they said you were unfit," she said, working a pattern on my chest with her nails.

"It was a frame. Somebody got me drunk, that's all."

I didn't like talking about it and I don't like thinking about it now. It was a bad jam. I was lucky that Gereth came along or I'd be there now. With a combination of money and expertise. He's a psychiatrist and so I became his "patient." He got me unstuck.

"Poor dear," Jessica said again. "You always were a bad drunk. But then Gereth is always there when you need him, isn't he?"

"He was for you," I said, and she laughed.

I suppose Gereth Johnson is responsible for my being here now. After he got me out of that hell, he went north — to Austria or Germany, someplace — to set up another sanitarium. But he recommended the south to me, and mentioned Los Campanillas del Dios as a quiet place to "recuperate," far from the troubles of Switzerland. A placid police force. A virgin beach. And Jessica. He showed me a card she had sent him. It was a picture postcard of the church bell tower, the most important structure in the area: "Los Capanillas de Los Campanillas del Dios," it said on the back of the card, "The Bells of Campanillas del Dios," and then underneath that in Jessica's brown ink: "Having a lovely time. Thinking of you."

"I was having a horrible time," she told me later. "Stuck in this hole with Mitch. I was going crazy."

So I came here. It was a real stroke of luck, because if I hadn't come here, I wouldn't have seen Mitch, and if I hadn't seen Mitch, I wouldn't be sitting on all of this money.

You see, Mitch was supposed

to have died climbing in Switzerland. He and Gereth were climbing the Schreckenstein together. They had climbed it safely several times before, but this time, Gereth came down alone. Mitch had fallen; his body was irrecoverable. Mitch Steiger, playboy heir, lost. Tragic.

The authorities didn't like the fact that the body was lost, but there wasn't much they could do about it. The crevasse where Gereth claimed Mitch had fallen was dangerous and inaccessible, all right — narrow and virtually bottomless. But it bordered one of the easiest parts of the climb, and that's what bothered the investigators. It was apparently a difficult crevasse to fall into, unless one were pushed.

But this was absurd to anyone who knew Gereth. For one thing, he is just not a killer. He's a very civilized man, a psychiatrist who owned a Swiss sanitarium that was used as a fashionable drying-out spa. He had to sell it after this trouble, though. At any rate, Gereth is not the sort of person who settles problems by throwing people into crevasses. Besides, he had nothing to gain from Mitch's death.

It never came to trial, but the incident broke things up in Silberstadt, and our little community of foreigners drifted apart. Mitch and Jessica had been the center of our group, and it just wasn't the same with Mitch

dead. Mitch had come from a very wealthy family of American industrialists, and although his income was limited by trust arrangements, he was generous with what he did have. The Steigers provided continuous entertainment for their friends, and they came to have a great number of friends.

Including me. I was riding the end of a small inheritance of my own — nothing like the kind of money that Mitch had behind him, just insurance money and a house, my parents having died in a boating accident the year before — and Mitch and Jessica seemed to adopt me. Mitch and I hit it off well. We skied together, we drank together and we hiked together, although he couldn't get me to share his great passion with him, which was climbing. We had a few misunderstandings — Mitch is a pretty volatile guy — but on the whole we got on very well. I got along with Jessica, too, but it wasn't until I got here that I realized how interested she was in me.

I had just returned from going outside to the bathroom — this house is air-conditioned, like several houses in Los Campanillas del Dios, but, like all the houses here, it has no indoor plumbing. I found Jessica sitting in the almost-dark living room, drinking coffee.

"When do you think he'll be back?" I said.

"He's only been gone a day, darling. Give the poor dear a chance."

I was beginning to think I might have made a mistake, letting him go alone.

"Don't be nervous, darling," she said. "Mitch is a very reliable man. Besides," she added, "you have me."

Jessica's a nice dividend. But I like money.

I went to Monte Carlo after the accident, and then drifted around. Jessica, as far as I knew, went to Paris, but I didn't see her the few times I was there. Then came the trouble in Geneva, and then Los Campanillas del Dios.

The first day I was here, sitting on the porch of the grandly-named Hotel de la Paz y Fortuna and listening to the bells, I saw Mitch driving an old dyspeptic Ford around the town square. And I realized what had happened.

Gereth hadn't killed Mitch. Mitch had staged his own death.

As you might imagine, this was a very pleasant surprise to me. It's nice to meet old friends in unfamiliar places.

Mitch's first response, when he realized what I knew and what I wanted, wasn't very friendly. He seemed to think that my request — a small amount, really, considering the capital that he had liberated from his trust fund — was unjust. But Jessica and I calmed him down, and he finally agreed to go to Mexico City and

convert some securities into cash. I agreed to stay in their house with Jessica. And Jessica agreed to everything.

So here I am, sitting in my room in the Steigers' house, waiting for Mitch to return from C de M with my money.

THERE HAS JUST BEEN a disturbance of some sort outside — someone prowling around the house, maybe a shot, hard to tell with the air-conditioning. Jessica came to my door pale.

"Something's going on outside," she said, her voice trembling slightly. "There are people out there."

"Can you see them?"

"Yes. They're moving around in the bushes."

It was probably locals coming to call. People in town, after all, must suspect that the Steigers have a lot of money and they must know that Mitch is out of town. After I calmed Jessica down, she gave me one of Mitch's pistols and a flashlight, and I went out to check. Nothing, although some of the shrubbery appeared disturbed. We'll have to keep our eyes open in the future. I'm not really worried about a few greedy local boys, but there's no point in being foolish.

It occurred to me briefly that Mitch might have come back quietly to check on his wife and his friend, but Jessica assured me

that wouldn't happen. "He knows I'd leave him if he did that," she said.

What he doesn't know is that she's going to leave him anyway.

IT HAS BEEN FIVE DAYS now since Mitch went to C de M, and I'm getting nervous. Jessica and I had a bad night last night and she has moved back into her own room. No, that was the night before last. If I go after Mitch, I'll probably pass him on the road. Jessica says to be patient, these things take time in Mexico. "This isn't Geneva," she says, and then smiles at me.

Last night was a bad night, too. I had some sleeping pills, but I used them all up. There is a kind of pressure in my head that bothers me at night and keeps me awake. That and the bells.

The famous bells of Los Campanillas del Dios make a prodigious amount of noise. The Steigers' house is quite a way from town, but even with the air-conditioning on and the house closed up, you can hear them clearly. I thought I'd get used to them — Jessica says they don't bother her — but it doesn't seem to be working that way. They are ill-tuned, like all church bells — what starts out as something vaguely recognizable ends up in a violent chaos of sounds. And they are unpredictable, going off not just on the hour but at odd times

in between the hours, sometimes for lengthy pieces, and especially at night. Still, I guess it's the only thing they have to be proud of around here. Without the bells, what would they put on their postcards?

SIX DAYS. Or seven. Jessica is quite concerned about my lack of sleep and has prescribed mescal. It doesn't work, but it helps a little. I think if she would move back into my room, it would help, but when I ask her, she just shakes her head.

At least there haven't been any more prowlers.

I SAW GERETH JOHNSON in town today. I was in the Hotel with Jessica — we have been eating a late lunch there the last couple of days — and he walked by outside. He didn't seem to see us, but I know it was him. It would be hard to mistake someone else for Gereth Johnson, especially in Los Campanillas del Dios — tall, slim, blond, impeccably dressed. I ran out after him, but I was too late. He either drove away — a car was leaving, but I couldn't see who was in it — or he ducked into an alley or a store. I looked in some, but I couldn't find him. The damned church bells started going the minute I got outside, and the noise aggravates the pressure in my head.

Then when I got back to the table, Jessica was gone. I was

frantic. I thought she had left me. I ran down to the train station, thinking somehow that she'd gotten the train to C de M, but of course that leaves in the morning.

I went back to the Hotel to ask Aurelio, the owner-bartender, where she'd gone, but he claimed not to know. That didn't seem likely to me, and I got a little upset. He kept shrugging his shoulders and smiling until finally I hit him. It turned out that the police chief was in the bar and he caused a little trouble, but he finally let me go home.

When I got back to the Steigers' house, Jessica was there, sitting in the living room, drinking my mescal. She claimed not to have seen Gereth, but I find it hard to believe her. I saw him. Still, why should she lie?

"You just *want* him to be here," she said. "You're feeling bad and want him to help you. So when you saw someone walk by out of the corner of your eye, you thought it was Gereth."

"Why the hell would I want Gereth Johnson to be here?" Sometimes Jessica doesn't make sense.

Jessica said she had left the Hotel because I was "making a scene." She was very concerned about me, she said, but she couldn't bear to see me when I was so upset.

She went back to town just now, to patch things up with Aurelio and get some more mescal.

THE DAMNED BELLS AGAIN. It seemed like they rang all night. How can people take it?

Jessica was out walking most of the day today. We didn't go to the hotel for lunch. Jessica said that Aurelio was still pretty angry with me. We'll have to give him a few days to cool down before we go back. And just at the time when I'd like to spend more time at the Hotel, looking for Gereth.

I wish to hell Mitch would get back.

AURELIO HAS AGREED to let Jessica and me eat at the Hotel again. All I had to do was apologize and satisfy Aurelio's sense of humor. The owner of the Hotel de la Paz y Fortuna loves grand words like honor.

We sit there most days now from about three in the afternoon to around eleven or twelve at night. The bells are loud in the Hotel, but not much louder for some reason than they are at our place. Twelve o'clock is an agony, but between the hours isn't much better. For no reason at all, and at no predictable intervals, they will strike up some cacophonous hymn or folktune.

The mescal helps.

No Gereth. No Mitch. Jessica and I sip mescal all afternoon and evening and stare out the dusty, fly-specked plate-glass window of the Hotel bar at the dogs and the old men sitting around the square.

I FOUND A POEM on the coffee table this morning, hand-written on Jessica's brown stationary, in her brown ink. I was afraid it was a note. "She's left," I said to myself and seized the paper. But it was a poem. She must have written it — or copied it — last night.

*When the bells jostle
The hollow night amid,
Then on my tongue the taste
is sour
Of all I ever did.*

"Did you write this?" I asked her when she got up. She was wearing a yellow robe. Her face was puffy from sleep and mescal, and her long black hair was disarranged.

"You weren't supposed to see that," she said when she saw what it was.

"You left it on the coffee table."

"I didn't mean to. It's just a poem I remembered from somewhere. It doesn't mean anything."

"Of course it means something."

"Well, I was thinking about you. Those bells bother you so much. Did you know you were screaming last night?"

"I wasn't screaming. What are you talking about?"

"Maybe you were asleep. Do you want some coffee?"

I hadn't screamed and I hadn't slept. I looked down at the poem I was holding. It was shaking. I put

the paper back on the table.

"I want a drink," I said.

"Can I ask you a very personal question?" Jessica took the bottle of mescal from the sideboard and put it on the coffee table in front of me. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

"Why should I not want to? Go ahead." My mouth was dry, but the mescal didn't seem to help much.

"Why did you kill your parents?"

"What?"

"I was wondering why you killed your parents."

"I didn't kill my parents! Who told you that?"

"Gereth said you told him you'd killed your parents."

"My parents died in an accident. A boating accident."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to upset you."

How could I have said anything like that to Gereth? It didn't make any sense.

Then I thought of something else.

"Jessica," I said. "When did Gereth tell you that?"

Her voice came out of the kitchen, where she was getting her coffee. "Oh, I don't know," she said vaguely. "A long time ago."

IT'S BEEN SEVERAL DAYS since I've written in this — this, my record, the only record of the truth, although God help me, I

don't know if it can save me now. My head is pounding. The bells have not stopped ringing for hours. The air-conditioner seems to have stopped working, and it's blazing in this room. But I have got to get this down as it happened. God knows what Jessica's version of it is or will be.

Last night — or the night before — *no, last night*, coming back from the hotel. Walking, as we have been. After midnight, after the twelve o'clock bells. (I want to get this straight). I was drunk. I had been drinking mescal and beer all day. I have been drinking beer all day today, but I am sober as a judge. What a phrase!

I was drunk last night, though, and we somehow — I was holding on to Jessica — we somehow stumbled down to the barranca that runs alongside the house. There are a lot of junk weeds along the slope and I must have tripped on one and fallen into the barranca. Filthy smells. People throw garbage and dead dogs down there.

I stumbled around a little, getting my balance, getting ready to climb out. It's about six feet down. And covered with filthy weeds and garbage. And dead dogs. Those damned bells!

As I was beginning to climb out, I saw Mitch. Leaning against a little scrub tree.

I was mad at him. He'd made me wait a long time. All that time.

I yelled, "You bastard!" and went for him and knocked him down and realized he was dead.

I don't know how long he had been there, but it had been a long time. He was wearing the clothes he had been wearing when he left for C de M — white, short-sleeved shirt, black trousers. So long ago. His skin was kind of tough and like putty. His face didn't have a mark on it, but when I looked at his belly I realized where the filthy smell was comin from. There were several wounds in the belly. His shirt was stuck to them — it was hard to tell where the shirt left off and the wounds began. Because they weren't red, the wounds, the way you'd expect. They were white, pale white. And moving.

"Jessica!" I cried. "My God! It's Mitch! He's dead!" But Jessica wasn't there. She had gone. Again. I didn't know what to do. I should have realized what was happening, but I didn't. I started to climb out of the barranca, but it was such a long way to the top and Mitch was at the bottom, and so I stayed with Mitch. He was lying face up next to the tree where I'd pushed him down. His stomach bloomed white in the darkness. There was vomit on his feet. It was fresh. Mine, I realized. I took off my shirt and wiped his shoes and waited with the dead.

The *guardias* came after a while and two of them helped me out of

the barranca. "It's all right," I kept saying, "it's all right, I'm not drunk." They smelled of hair oil and wine.

The Chief was there — the one who had stopped me after I hit Aurelio. He talked to me in English. Very slowly. As if talking to a very young child.

"Do you know that man?" he said. "Do you recognize your friend?"

I nodded.

"He is dead. *Muerto.*"

I nodded again.

"Did you kill him?"

"No!" I said loudly. Everyone was always asking me if I had killed people. "I did *not* kill them."

"There is only one dead person here," he said calmly. "Dr. Johnson."

I started giggling, but stopped fast. I don't think he noticed. "That's not Dr. Johnson," I said. "Is that what you think? That's Mitch Steiger. How could you mistake him for Gereth? That's Mitch."

He looked gravely at the other *guardias*. There must have been five or six of them.

"Mr. Steiger is dead," he said to me, still in that calm voice, "but he is dead in Switzerland. This man is Dr. Johnson. You recognize him. He was a friend of yours."

"No! That is Mr. Steiger. He is not dead in Switzerland. He is dead in the ditch."

The bells were clanging away. It was hard to hear myself talk. But I tried to explain to them about Silberstadt and the Schreckenstein, but they didn't want to listen. One of the *guardias* grabbed me sharply by the arms, for what reason I don't know.

"*Placido*," he said, "*se placido.*"

"Not Mr. Steiger," the Chief was saying. "This man I have played cards with. I have seen his passport. He helped you sometimes, didn't he? Dr. Johnson? He treated you. Am I right?"

"*No. No-muerto.*"

"*Placido*," the *guardia* kept saying.

After that, things are cloudy for me. They searched the house and found the gun that Jessica had given me and a couple of other guns, and took them. Gereth Johnson showed up. By then I was in the house and they wouldn't let me go down to him, although that would have cleared everything up. After a while they left, and everything became quiet. No shouts, no bells. Before they left, the Chief, a serious, concerned expression on his face, told me not to leave the house. I guess he meant it. When I went out to visit the outhouse, a *guardia* with a *carabina* appeared behind me.

Early this morning — just when things were beginning to lighten up — Jessica came back. The *guardia* came in with her. He

stood by the door watching me, his rifle crooked under his arm, smoking a cigarette. I asked Jessica where she'd been, but she didn't say anything. I knew she'd been with Gereth. She went into her room and started packing a few clothes.

"I'm leaving for a while," she said to me through the doorway. "This all has me very upset."

"Jessica," I said, "do they really think I killed Mitch?"

"Mitch?"

"Yes, Mitch, damn it, your husband."

"That was Gereth out there," she said. "Gereth. And yes, they think you killed him."

"What is going on here?"

She stopped her packing and looked at me. Her eyes were all red, as if she'd been crying.

"*What is going on here*," she said, "is that you've killed my lover and thrown his body in a ditch outside my house. If Gereth hadn't helped you and trusted you, he'd be alive today."

"You planned this whole thing with Gereth." No reply. She was stuffing clothes quickly into a small bag. "This is not going to work," I said.

"Gereth is dead," she said. "They have your gun. With your fingerprints on it. The gun that killed Gereth." She was talking like the police chief, very slowly and clearly. "He was coming back to try to get me out of here. You heard him outside. Remember?

I wish you would face up to these things. All anybody ever wanted to do was to help you. You locked me in the house and went outside and shot him and threw his body in the ditch. Then you came back and told me that there was no one there."

"Oh, Jesus, Jesus." Jessica shot Mitch that night. She told him to come back and then she shot him. Or Gereth did. Then she came to my room and handed me the gun and flashlight and sent me outside to look for prowlers:

"How did you know that I wouldn't find him that night?" She was silent. But I hadn't looked in the barranca. Only a madman would climb down there in the dark, into the pit. They would have had the body well-hidden in there, anyway. They would want to make sure that I was nervous and jumpy enough not to be believed before they turned me in. Nervous about Mitch. And Jessica. And Gereth. Filled with mescal. Causing trouble in the Hotel.

"They're going to keep you here until they can come from Mexico City. They don't want you in the local jail."

"Afraid I'll infect the others."

"They won't buy that emotionally disturbed bit again, I'm afraid. You just can't do this in every country you visit and expect to get away with it. And this isn't Geneva, you know."

"Listen," I said. "We can still work this out. We'll do it together.

I'll help you the same as Gereth did. For whatever payment Gereth got. That's fair, isn't it?"

Her expression said: Gereth got me.

I'm not sure I could take that much payment, even now.

IT'S ABOUT NOON NOW and extremely hot. My head hurts a great deal. The air-conditioning is not working. I tried to go out and fix it, but all the doors are locked. Jessica is gone. I banged on the front door and a *guardia* finally came. He will let me out to visit the outhouse, but for no other reason. He says the air-conditioning is working, which is simply not true.

The papers are sticking to my forearms. I've got to get the truth down and get this out to someone. If I can.

While Mitch was planning the Schreckenstein with Jessica, Jessica was planning Los Campanillas with Gereth. What had Jessica said? "Gereth is always there when you need him." I wonder if I was a part of their plan all along. I guess I was always there when they needed me, too.

Poor Mitch, just as stupid as I was.

The bells again. Too many to count. What time is it? It's not dark yet. How long have I been sitting here?

But waiting out in the weeds, with the snakes and the dogs. That's no way to live, Mitch.

Obituary

by THOMAS DWYER

Sure they lied, but they could use the payoff money. What was the big deal anyway? They could always get the guy next time!

IT WAS A GOOD ARREST. We had nailed Alonzo Curzo and he was big in felonies, and we had him in a detention cell in the Criminal Court Building. I was down-stairs getting the Complaint typed. The clerk looked up from his typewriter and said,

“You got this guy good.”

“Thanks.”

“They’ll throw away the key.”

“Good.”

Thatcher, my partner, came down the stairs looking for me.

“We’re not sure it was Curzo,” he said.

“C’mon, we were this close to him.”

“We can’t make a positive ID.”

“The hell we can’t.”

Thatcher took me by the arm

and we went over into a corner. “If we don’t make a positive ID,” he said, “we get three hundred apiece.”

“Who says?”

“Curzo’s lawyer.”

I got back on the Complaint line and changed the details, and when the clerk finished the typing he handed it back, but couldn’t look at me. He knew.

Thatcher and I went upstairs. Curzo was standing in one of the detention cells. We pointed at him, and the Correction Cop gave him to us.

The Court was in session, was strictly arraignment. They had a little desk set up in front of the Bench. The Court attendant read the charges and Thatcher and I

escorted Curzo across the room to the little table, and we stood there beside him. Curzo's lawyer came in through the railing gate, and stood at his other side.

The DA was at a desk piled high with papers. The DA was a dame, but at first she had me fooled with a tweed pants suit and a shirt with a tie and a pair of cuff-links. She started to read our Complaint, but put it down quickly, and called me over.

"You've no positive ID," she said.

"We're not sure of it."

"Curzo will walk out the door."

"We're afraid of putting the wrong guy away."

The DA went up to the Bench and gave the story to the Judge. The Judge took on a weary look and banged his gavel a couple of times, and waved Thatcher and me up to his Desk. He wanted to know how two 1st Grade detectives could bring a suspect into Court without sufficient evidence. I gave him the old saw that as Law Officers we were just as interested in protecting the innocent, as in prosecuting the guilty, and in this case, now, had doubts of the ID. The Judge didn't buy it, but he couldn't prove anything. He gave us a lecture on sloppy arrests and dismissed the case.

Curzo and his lawyer turned and went up the aisle and out the door. Thatcher and me didn't leave right away, but stalled

around to give Curzo's lawyer enough time to setup the payoff. Then we walked out into the Hall.

Curzo's lawyer was standing in the corridor down near a band of public phone booths. He held a folded newspaper in one hand, and as we walked by he handed Thatcher the newspaper and said, "Try the Want Ads."

We went across the street and opened the paper and in the Classified Section was the money. It was green, and crisp, and easy.

Actually Thatcher and I had made Curzo's arrest on a tip. We had conned our way into an apartment over on E. 76th street by using the pass-word. There had been a dozen guys sitting at a long table talking into telephones, and marking down bets on long yellow pads. It was a Bookmaker's factory.

When the guys saw Thatcher and me, they hung up the phones and began swallowing the yellow pad paper. Someone from another room came running in to see what was going on. It was Curzo, and he stood there in the door-way long enough to give us a mug-shot we couldn't forget. Then he ran down to the other end of the apartment building where we thought we had him trapped. But the building was a double-winger with no fire-escapes; instead it had a fire-door at the far end of the apartment. Curzo was gone.

It was no problem. We knew where to find him. We drove over

to a Bar near the Port Authority Bus Terminal, went in and put the cuffs on him. Nobody looked up from their beers.

After we got the payoff money, Thatcher and I waited across the street from the Court House until Curzo and his lawyer came out and got into a cab. Then we walked down the block to Donnelly's and went into the back-room. A bartender came in who knew us, put a bottle on the table and left it there. We had a drink. Thatcher patted the pocket where he carried his wallet, and said, "Every little bit helps."

"Yeah."

"When I retire, I'm not going to wind up as a guard in a supermarket."

"Me, either."

"We're not hurting anybody," said Thatcher. "We got four commendations between us, so the Public is getting plenty of protection. But the pay is lousy and we got to take advantage of the fringe benefits."

"Yeah."

A few days later Thatcher and I were in the Squad Room when a 1st Grader came in and said, "Didn't you guys grab Curzo the other night?"

"Yeah, but we didn't have enough to hold him."

"Too bad."

"Don't worry. We'll get him good the next time."

"Too late. Last night he killed a cop."

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

Tibetan monks have long known the deadly secret of destroying their enemies, not by some mystic or exotic form of the martial arts, but by the simple expedient of sending the intended victim a slip of paper upon which are written the words:

OMNI PADNE HUM DO HO

One glance at this magic phrase and the reader is doomed, for there is no known spell which can counteract it and no one is immune to its tragic effect. Within the first week after exposure, various parts of the body begin dropping off — a finger here, an elbow there, maybe an eyeball after that, followed perhaps by a nose, and so on. It's an unpleasant way to go. Sure is lucky none of you read those words!

Mike's Mail



Got something you'd like to say to Mike, the authors, the editor, the publisher, other readers? Write: Mike's Mail, MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Renown Publications, P.O. Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335. Let's hear from you!

SICK

Regarding your "Important Notice" printed in MSMM, December 1979: Please explain the need for "Wartime Paper Rationing!"

Is this some war most Americans are unaware of, or someone's idea of a very sick joke?

M. Winik
Morris, Illinois

The war, of course, is the Big One: WWII — and if we all pull together, tighten our belts, and make home-front sacrifices, we'll soon have the axis on the run.

Someone once said to me, "Fritch, your attempts at humor are laughable." I think I was talking to myself at the time, an occupational hazard among editors who are afraid no one else will speak to them, and often with good reason. I suppose I should have known that sooner or later

someone would take offense at my whimsical fillers, but honestly, M., don't you get bored reading over and over again the names of writers coming up in future issues? The object of a filler is simply to fill space that would otherwise be blank, and I would rather fill that space with something surprising, interesting, provocative, perhaps even controversial, and often (hopefully) amusing. Sometimes it doesn't work, but at least I'm in there trying.

HYSTERICALLY?

I doubt if your readers will become hysterical if you publish some stories in two parts.

Rimer S. Stissel
Williamson, W. VA

Thanks for your vote of confidence, Rimer. The second half of your letter will appear next month.

SHAYNE'S NOT ENOUGH

First of all: it's wonderful that you have started a letter page for the fans of Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine. As proven in the days of the pulps, letters can often change the course of a magazine . . . for the better!

I am an historian of MSMM, and at present I am compiling an index to the magazine, which is due for publication later this year. I have a nearly complete set of MSMM . . . only need a listing of the contents page for the April (?) 1957 issue, containing the 2nd part of "Weep For A Blonde Corpse," V2 N1. Perhaps a fellow collector, somewhere out there, may be able to supply me with this information.

The letter from Gary Seiler (February 1980) has prompted me to write this letter. I can't get enough of Shayne! But there is one alternative . . . include another series character within the pages of MSMM. A companion character, if you will, to Mike Shayne. I understand that Mike Avallone will be a regular contributor now to MSMM with his popular Ed Noon stories. This should satisfy Gary, along with the many Noon fans. Mike (Avallone) has already contributed 26 stories to MSMM under his own name, the majority of which are about

Ed Noon. It will be a pleasure to see his name listed in future issues. I do agree with Gary that you should have companion magazines to MSMM. It was so nice, back in the 60's, when you could go to your local news dealer and pick up several magazines from Renown Publications; like Shell Scott, Charlie Chan and the U.N.C.L.E. series. Charlie Chan was in the early 70's, but you see what I mean.

I would like to make a comment on a recent novel, "Death on the Strip" by Gary Brandner (December 1979 & January 1980). I have been anxiously awaiting this novel since 1974, but I believe Sammy Chung spelled his name differently in 1974. However, I am glad that the story has finally appeared, regardless of the change in the character's name.

Regarding the reprinting of earlier stories, I do not care for this. But what I would rather see is some of my old friends back in the pages of MSMM; like Dennis Lynds, Clayton Matthews, John Jakes, Talmage Powell, and others. I could name hundreds of earlier authors that have contributed fantastic "capers" to MSMM, and I would like to see their names listed again. Not reprints, but new stories.

Regarding the index, mentioned above, I would enjoy hearing from some of your authors (if they read the letter page). Some information I need are their pen names used

in the magazine, house names they may have written under, or series characters they wrote about (especially under a house name). In order for the index to be as complete as possible, and for the authors to get full credit due them, it will be necessary for them to contact me.

One final request: if your warehouse contains back issues of Magazines like Shell Scott, Charlie Chan, The U.N.C.L.E. Series, or Renown's science fiction publications of years past, why not list them "for sale" in the pages of MSMM?

Tom Johnson
RT 1 Box 46
Knox City, TX
79529

I think it's a pretty safe bet, Tom, that the lovable redhead Miami detective will be in each and every issue of MSMM. Regarding a "companion character": I've talked over some approaches to this with a couple of our best writers, and there should be some rather surprising stories coming up soon. Meanwhile, we do have series characters appearing more or less regularly in the pages of MSMM: Fieldhouse's popular Lansing of the CID, for example, and Reasoner's private eye, Markham.

We often discuss, here at Renown, putting out more magazines, but in this age of

rising costs of paper, services, etc., it's not as easy as it was fifteen or twenty years ago — and frankly, most magazines aren't selling all that well.

Unfortunately, our warehouse doesn't contain any of the magazines you mention, which is a shame. I'd like to have them myself.

I'm sure our authors read the letter columns. I hope they get in touch with you to help out your project.

MS LOVER

After reading Gary's letter in the MSMM February issue, I wonder why he buys MSMM if he wants something else. I love MS novelettes and the variety of short stories by other authors, especially Edward D. Hoch. There are a number of Weird books on the market, but not near enough good mystery fiction magazines. I keep mine in my purse so I can catch a quick story when I have a few minutes.

It's a good clean magazine. If you change anything, make it twice a month or larger.

Chris Tilghman
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

P.S. I didn't care too much for the two-part serial. The story was fine. I just hate to wait for the ending.

KEEP MIKE!

Mike Shayne's story once a month is fine — don't change. I like longer stories, so the novlettes please me.

Earl W. Litsheim
Ironwood, Michigan.

TOO MUCH CHITCHAT?

I have a subscription to your Mike Shayne Magazine. I'm sure not going to renew my sub unless I see more stories in each issue. After all, two short stories and one novelet and a serial you have to wait another month to finish isn't much. You have more of your chitchat in it than stories.

Emma Conant
Strongsville, Ohio

The wordage in the December MSMM was the same as always, but because of the serial there were fewer stories, so it did seem like you were getting less for your money even though you weren't. The issues after that contained more stories, which should have pleased you. We even managed to sneak in a couple of increased-page issues — before inflation caught up with us.

As for chitchat, well, I'm just a friendly fellow, and I do enjoy editing MSMM and trying to make

it a good package and reading letters from readers and so forth, and sometimes my enthusiasm bubbles over into the editorial parts.

APRIL IRE

I suggest you increase the price of your magazine a penny an issue and use the additional revenue to hire someone to read the stories you publish prior to the time the magazine is printed.

The stories, for the most part are interesting, but the time spent assembling them by adding and deleting a sentence or paragraph here and there is time consuming and I just don't have time to do it.

I am enclosing examples, please note the page numbers, etc.

Please mail my \$1.50 refund for the April issue to the above address and drop me a card when you get this matter resolved in order that I may start buying the magazine again.

R. G. Gudgel
Crown Point, IN

When you're right, R.G., you're right, and when you plunk down your money you have every right to expect a perfect magazine. I've seldom seen one, from us or anybody else, even under ideal conditions, but the expectation is always there.

Conditions for the April issue were far from ideal. One of our layout artists suddenly quit, and to replace him we unwittingly hired

a five-and-a-half-foot gremlin. Before we discovered this otherwise normal-appearing creature's purpose in life was enforcing Murphy's Law, she'd done more damage in a week than we could find and correct before printing deadline. Okay, so you complained about the ten percent we got wrong. How about the ninety percent we got right?

As for buying or not buying the magazine, do whatever you think best. I'd rather have ninety percent of MSMM than two hundred percent of something else, but of course that's a personal matter. However, we now have someone whose sole job is checking final copy, so current and future issues should have fewer mistakes.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

Briefly, I can't comment on each issue as much as I'd like to, thanks to the antiquated postal system that speeds the magazine from you to me; I've just got the December issue, and I suspect that you're already planning the February issue, if it hasn't already gone to press! And incidentally that December issue (in an envelope) came only a few days later than the November issue (in a mailing wrapper), which reinforces my suspicion that someone else is reading it along the way...

Now as to why I read Mike

Shayne, it's above all for the sheer entertainment, for stories that are plain and straightforward and light years away from the convoluted prose that passes for literary fiction; and also that this private eye from the Fifties is still going strong into the Eighties; I find a special Sense of Wonder in the fact, which almost gives me as much entertainment as the fiction!

But I definitely approve of what you're doing, as Sam and Larry seem to have done before you, that is (and correct me if I'm wrong) bringing more famous names to its pages, and generally bringing it up till it becomes a rival to *Ellery Queen's*; and judging from past issues, that won't be too long delayed! I remember *Alfred Hitchcock's* was in a similar position before it was taken over by Davis Publications, and the difference is amazing; though that you're doing it on your own is a far greater achievement.

On the thorny question of running a story in two parts, I've known the sf magazines do it for years; though I must admit it's the first time I've seen it in a mystery mag; but are the two readerships that much different? I like the idea; and think how many new readers you'll get for the next issue, wanting to know what happens next!

And the run of editors: Sam Merwin (I've read *The White Widow*, and several others) Larry

T. Shaw (ditto some of the issues of *SF Adventures* that he used to edit) and now your good self (I still remember *Horses' Asteroid*), though not forgetting Leo Margulies, par excellence; is there a West Coast Mafia? And something else: couldn't you find a more up to date notice (in the December issue) to remind us to order in advance?

Ah well, I'll probably have some more comments in another few issues' time; my vote of confidence is that I've renewed my sub for another two years . . .

Roger Waddington
North Yorkshire, England

Thanks for the nice words, Roger. I think the problem of serials has pretty well resolved itself. Now if we can just shoo the gremlins out of the typography, we'll be doing all right.

As far as science fiction and mystery readerships is concerned, I'm sure there's a lot of crossover, that many people read both. I know many writers who write in both fields with equal facility. In fact, the last three editors of MSMM are probably better known in sf than in mysteries. Leo Margulies was an editorial phenomenon in many fields; I was selling sf stories to his pulp magazines in the early fifties (I was just a kid!) and didn't meet the gentleman until an MWA meeting in California a few years

ago. Leo was one of the Good People, and also in that category is his widow, Cylvia Kleinman, who continued publishing MSMM until the current publishers took over.

My personal and editorial feeling is that Entertainment should be the theme of MSMM — not just the huggy-bunny stories either. As far as Famous Names are concerned, they didn't get there by lacking talent, so I'll do what I can.

ABOUT PHYLLIS

Why is it that the book where Mike's wife was killed in New Orleans has never been reprinted? I have read almost every Mike Shayne Mystery, but this one I can't find. It is referred to once in a while in the older books.

Thank you for your help in the matter. Maybe you could send me the name of the book.

Grace V. Roesch
Westbury, NY

I asked Tom Johnson, who has done and is doing research on Mike Shayne, about this (see his other letter in MIKE'S MAIL), and he sent the following:

Thanks very much for the quick reply regarding my previous letter. I hope that you can be of

help, and will drop a kind word to your authors about my Mike Shayne project.

Maybe I can be of help to the reader requesting information on Phyllis (Brighton) Shayne. To my knowledge Phyllis did not die during a novel. Here is what I have on the question:

Dividend on Death (1939 Holt)

1st Shayne novel. Mike meets Phyllis, and falls in love with her.

The Private Practice of Michael Shayne (1940 Holt) 2nd Shayne novel. Mike again meets Phyllis, and after the case is finished Mike & Phyllis get married (though I don't believe they are married during the story, only after the novel was published).

The Uncomplaining Corpses (1940 Holt) 3rd Shayne novel. With Phyllis.

Tickets for Death (1941 Holt)
4th Shayne novel. With Phyllis.

Bodies are Where you Find Them (1941 Holt) 5th Shayne novel.
With Phyllis.

The Corpse Came Calling (1942)
Dodd, Mead) 6th Shayne novel.
With Phyllis.

Murder Wears A Mummer's Mask (1943 Dodd, Mead) 7th
Shayne novel. With Phyllis.
After this novel, or case, Phyllis goes to the hospital to have their baby. Both Phyllis and the baby die during childbirth.

Blood on the Black Market (1943)

Dodd, Mead) 8th Shayne novel.
The first case Mike is on after the death of Phyllis.

Michael Shayne's Long Chance (1944 Dodd, Mead) 9th Shayne novel. Mike meets Lucile Hamilton during a case, and at the end she is considering the job of secretary for Mike.

Murder and the Married Virgin

(1944 Dodd, Mead) 10th Shayne novel. Lucy is now Mike's secretary.

I hope this information answers the questions concerning Phyllis for your reader. I will be glad to help if I can. The above novels are still around in paperback editions, though there have been several title changes with the reprints, so the reader should check the copyright page for original title and publishing date.

Thanks for the help, and don't hesitate to ask more questions concerning Mike Shayne. This helps me also. I enjoy Mike Shayne, and prefer the shorter magazine version of his exploits to that of the complete novel. I look forward to each and every issue of the MSMM. And I am glad to see an editor involved, as you are, with the editorial of the magazine. Keep up the good work . . . and keep Mike Shayne on a monthly publication.

Tom Johnson
Rt 1 Box 46
Knox City, TX
79529

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

If you have not yet discovered Pierre Audemars, now is the time to do so. In *Slay Me a Sinner* he tells a delightful story of the young M. Pinaud, an agent of the Surete, who very nearly witnesses a murder and who is determined to conduct an investigation. All this happens in a small French village where there is unanimous agreement that the dead man was a blight on the face of the earth in general and within that village in particular. His passing was, everyone insists, a most happy accident. The ardent young detective is fed evidence, all of it pointing to an accident. All witnesses agree. Alone and unwanted, M. Panaud carries determinedly on with predictable results. This is a most enjoyable book with a good deal of sound philosophy to leaven the loaf. Miss this one at your own risk. (Walker, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Another absolute delight is the second Frank Parrish novel about Dan Mallett, the most unlikely detective on the current literary scene. Our Dan is an occasional handyman, a very frequent poacher, and a dedicated

con artist who shifts in and out of British rural dialects with accomplished ease. While not otherwise engaged, he is a skillful burglar. He does it all for his mother to whom he gives tender loving care. Our Dan first appeared in *Fire in the Barley*, an auspicious debut despite a rather threadbare plot. Now we have *Sting of the Honeybee*, which is several notches better. When a big time London bookmaker with strong underworld connections tries to force two elderly sisters to sell him their farm, he employs the most ruthless methods. However, he does not count on Our Dan who also has a full knowledge of roguery. A captivating entertainment. (Dodd Mead, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Kit Thackeray, a new young novelist, has made superb use of his background, the jungles of Brazil, in *Counterflood*; in fact, this is one of the best "background" books in a very long time. However, the reader is warned that this is strong stuff. Early in the game he provides an autopsy scene that is clinically accurate, but definitely not for ladies who

like to read about Miss Marple. The action level is high and violent death abounds as totally ruthless landowners try to knock each other out. A highly vivid book that calls for a strong stomach upon occasion. Regrettably, the last few pages are a disappointment as the author tries too hard to wring out one more twist of fate and overplays his hand. Otherwise a notable effort. (Morrow, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The Lure by Felice Picano starts off with a bang that has the reader engrossed in the first few pages, but it quickly deteriorates into a long, highly specific, and depressing saga of homosexual life in New York. A college professor who is being pressed to publish is set up by police authorities to play the role of a homosexual in order to attract the attention of a major criminal who operates in that community. The author has planted some surprises, but most of them can be seen coming from a long distance away. We were not amused. (Delacorte, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

In *The Adam Sleep* a very bright but disturbed boy believes that his unwed mother was clinically impregnated with the frozen spleen of a stone age man, an obsession supported by a news story of the discovery of a frozen body of great antiquity in Russia. A resident in psychiatry at a great New York medical center accepts the boy for treatment and discovers that he has acquired a real can of worms. The whole is very well worked out and, for once, there is a truly sympathetic and intelligent cop. There are some very good characterizations here, supported by superior story telling. Obviously the author knows the medical field about which he writes. He certainly should, as he was formerly the director of the Office of Public Interest for the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in Manhattan. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Life with delinquent teenagers is the setting for *Minor Murders* by Joe L. Hensley. Attorney Donald Robac is engaged to defend a fifteen-year-old female delinquent charged with murder. During the course of his investigation he uncovers much wrongdoing in the welfare system. There is a very good unsufferable teenager who feels that he is smarter than any adult alive and a fake bishop who is, unfortunately, all too true to life in some localities. We are never told where this story takes place — which city or state — and this, we believe, makes some of the scenes harder to visualize. Ripping off the child

care agencies is not a new theme, but it is realistically treated here. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Some additional notes of interest to crime fiction buffs:

The University of Pittsburgh Press has announced three new titles: *Dashiell Hammett: a Descriptive Bibliography* by Richard Layman; *Raymond Chandler: A Descriptive Bibliography* by Matthew J. Brucoli; and *Improbable Fiction: The Life of Mary Roberts Rinehart* by John Cohn. Since review copies have not yet been received, detailed comment cannot be offered, but the status of the publisher should guarantee that these are responsible and properly scholarly works. (The University of Pittsburgh Press, 127 N. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.)

☆ ☆ ☆

Mystery Stranger Than Fiction by Leo Grex unfortunately does not live up to its title. Eleven cases are detailed from various parts of the world, some solved and some still open. While the accounts are interesting, it must be noted that they are, in several instances at least, no more than the police reports contain on a regular basis. Such cases as the Hillside Strangler in Los Angeles and the multiple murders of more

than twenty boys and young men in Chicago now being adjudicated are, unfortunately, considerably more impressive as stories of true crime and its solution. Also, if Mr. Grex is going to continue writing in the crime field, he should note that famous family of British executioners is named Pierrepont, not Pierpont as he renders it. (St. Martin's Press, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

It has been well known for some time that James Hilton wrote a mystery *Was It Murder?* under a pseudonym. Now this work, under the author's real name, is available in paperback. (Perennial, \$1.95). Also new in paperback is Kenneth Fearing's well-known classic *The Big Clock*. (Perennial, \$1.95) Penguin offers Gwen Robyns' *The Mystery of Agatha Christie* "An intimate biography of the first lady of crime." In addition to the text there are a number of very interesting photographs. (A hardcover edition is available from Doubleday). Ruth Rendell fans, which are legion, will be delighted to know that her *A Sleeping Life* is now available from Bantam at \$1.95. The cover, incidentally, is well designed to catch the eye. Miss Rendell is one of the real pros in the fascinating field of crime fiction, an artist who seldom disappoints.

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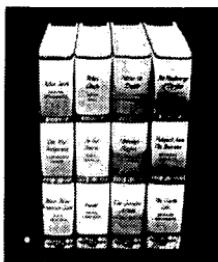
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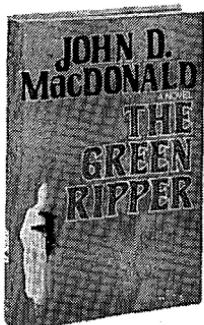
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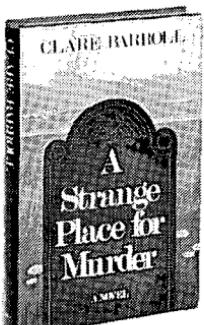
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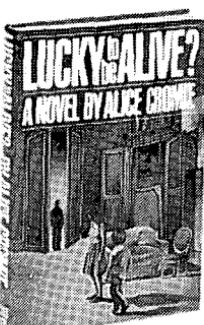
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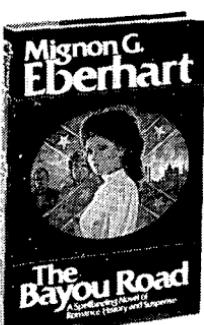
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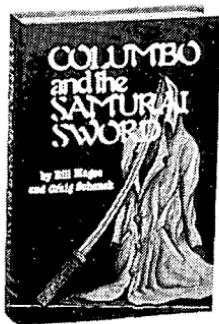
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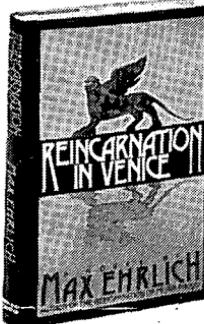
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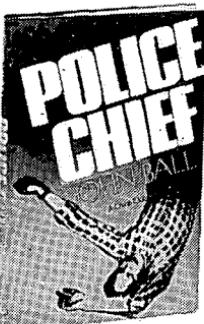
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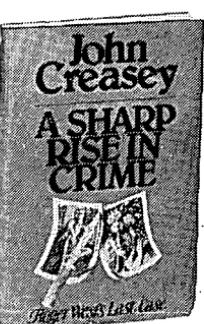
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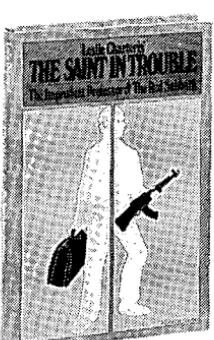
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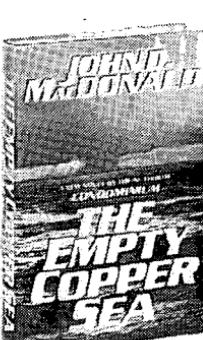
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